

CBW

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For PCV Professionals

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1st
with the news
every
Wednesday

THIS WEEK



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Dealing with bad news

I attended First Manchester's PR extravaganza a couple of weeks ago. It was impressive on a number of counts: the attendance, the marshalling of the vehicles around the City of Manchester Stadium's car park, the cold!

But perhaps what was most impressive was the reason for the event. To admit very publicly to a whole pile of major mistakes and issues and then to focus on how they are being fixed. No claims that everything was rosy and perfect, but a clear, businesslike presentation of the facts. "Yes, we've messed up but look what we're doing about it."

The same was true of a visit I paid to East Lancs Coachbuilders last week. I'd set up the visit some time ago (full article next week) and then, when a press release turned up, again a couple, of weeks ago, announcing consultation leading to redundancies I'd assumed I'd get blown out. Surely John Horn wouldn't want a bloody journalist sitting in his office after admitting the company had issues to deal with?

But, there was none of it. John explained the situation, honestly, and we moved on to other things.

All credit to him, his fellow directors and East Lancs. Like any business it's had its ups and downs, and in fact it's looking pretty rosy in Blackburn, but they need a bit of restructuring and they're getting on with it.

What I find impressive and refreshing about both East Lancs' and First's approach is that both companies are prepared to admit that there are issues they have to deal with and they are prepared to be big enough to take the rough with the smooth.

Too many companies hide behind a smokescreen of spin and disinformation. Surely it's always the best policy to just get on with it. Get the bad news out of the way, deal with the criticism - should there be any, I think most companies would find their customers, and even the media, god forbid, are broadly sympathetic to companies that admit mistakes - and get on with it. Deal with it, as one of my colleagues would say!



Andy Sutcliffe
Editorial Director

Coach and Bus Week is a supporter of the following organisations:



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Alexander's bus thoughts due soon as he meets 'big five'

SoS met with big operators last week but no details released

Transport secretary Douglas Alexander met with the 'big five' bus operators last week to discuss his 'emerging thinking on bus travel' - although the participants remain tight lipped about what was discussed.

Meanwhile, junior transport minister Gillian Merron told MPs that new legislation on buses would be included in the upcoming draft Road Transport Bill. Previously ministers were not certain that new legislation would be required.

Both First Group and Stagecoach acknowledged to *CBW* that the meeting occurred but neither were prepared

to make any comment about what the minister told them.

The revelations came during Transport Questions last week, a routine monthly session in the House of Commons.

Douglas Alexander was responding to a question from Anna Eagle MP, a campaigner for re-regulation, about falling ridership on Merseyside.

He said: "Tomorrow, I will meet the 'big five' bus operators to discuss our emerging thinking on bus travel. I fear that the situation described is not unique to her area, and that is why we need to take action. It is on that basis that we



Douglas Alexander

will bring forward our proposals." Later he said that there would be no return to the state-owned and controlled pre-1986 situation.

During the same parliamentary session, minister Gillian Merron replied to a question from Bournemouth MP Tobias Ellwood about service changes made to Yellow Buses since its takeover by Transdev. She said: "We will shortly set out detailed proposals on the direction of future bus policy, and legislative measures will be included in the draft road transport bill."

The DfT is expected to reveal the draft bill before Christmas.

Concessionary travel bill launched

Number 10 Downing Street became an ad hoc bus stop on Monday as a group of pensioners and disabled people helped the prime minister and the DfT ministerial team to launch the new Concessionary Travel Bill.

The bus was supplied by Arriva North Kent and driven by Bus Driver of the Year Scott McHale. It is believed to be the first time a bus has ever called at Downing Street. *CBW* was the only trade publication invited to the event.

The new bill extends concessionary travel for the disabled and pensioners from local authority areas to the whole of England and will become law in April 2008.

The prime minister said: 'I am delighted to welcome people from all over the country to Downing Street this morning who will benefit from the new bus fares scheme.'

'From 2008, disabled people and those 60 and over will be able to travel anywhere in England - not just within their local authority - for free, at off peak times.'



The PM catches the bus outside Number 10... probably for the first time?

'I know many people have pressed for this countrywide scheme - and it was good to have the chance to speak to people today about the difference it will make.'

The government says it has been discussing the possibility of reciprocal arrangements with Scotland and Wales and

the Bill includes a power to allow, via regulations in the future, for mutual recognition of concessionary bus passes across the UK. Various issues and practicalities, such as interoperability of passes would need to be considered and consulted upon before mutual recognition is possible it says.

Third Metroline walkout averted at last minute

Talks between Metroline and the TGWU union narrowly averted a third 24-hour strike at the north London bus operator this week.

Having already rejected a revised offer which had seen Metroline increase this year's pay rise from 3% to 4%, the third walkout was set to stop all routes on Monday, November 27.

However, over the weekend further discussions were held which meant that a further new, and as yet undisclosed, offer was put forward by the ComfortDelGro-owned operator. The proposal will be put to staff in a ballot this week.

In the meantime, the planned strike which would have lasted for 24 hours from 4am on Monday morning, was called off.

"We're absolutely delighted that Monday's action has been averted," said Metroline chief operating officer Sean O'Shea.

"We're happy with the deal that the TGWU will now take to our workforce, and we hope the situation will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction very soon."



Errr... a pair of smart pants... yesterday

Smart buses in South Yorks

South Yorkshire PTE is giving away pairs of knickers to promote its first 'Smart Route' bus services in Sheffield.

Transport minister Gillian Merron officially unveiled the route last week. The five year £5m scheme has been developed in conjunction with operators Stagecoach and First Group and includes bus stop upgrades, priority measures and an innovative, comprehensive marketing campaign designed to persuade customers out of their cars.

Both First and Stagecoach have invested heavily in new vehicles to be used on the routes.

Teams of SYPTE travel advisors descended on bus stops along the route during the first week of operation handing out goody bags, which included the knickers as well as other items all branded with the 'Smart' marketing message.

For a full report on all the initiatives being undertaken by SYPTE – including the new Doncaster interchange – see next week's *CBW*.

STOP PRESS >>>>

A public inquiry into two coach companies based at the same yard north of Newcastle, from which Rush Travel and A-Coach North East operated, failed to start on Monday after a whole day spent discussing whether VOSA evidence is adequate to let the inquiry proceed.

George Weir, director of AA&H Travel Ltd trading as A Coach, director of Smiths Travel (of Amble) Ltd, and director of Instyle Holidays of Ellington, Morpeth faced allegations from VOSA that his were Phoenix companies, manipulated by John Rush and Margaret Gray who were disqualified from being directors at a previous public inquiry.

Barrister Mark Laprell argued that Mr Weir had no case to answer, as the evidence "simply wasn't adequate." Deputy Traffic Commissioner Mark Hinchliffe reserved his decision, and will issue a statement in due course as to whether the inquiry will proceed.

Full report of proceedings next week.

Stand changes in Manchester

The first stage of routeing and stopping changes came into action in central Manchester this week as part of a concerted change to ease pressure around Manchester Piccadilly and alleviate the congestion that led to a Traffic Regulation Condition (TRC) being imposed in September. Some Piccadilly stands have been altered, route flows changed, and a new setting down stop created.

The changes were presaged by a withdrawal of objections to the TRC (*CBW* November 15), when Stagecoach Manchester reported a new spirit of co-operation between Manchester City Council, the PTE, and bus operators.

Four of the most heavily used stands on Parker Street have been swapped between each other, meaning that more buses can enter via Portland Street, reducing the pressure on Mosley Street. A setting down stop in York Street has been opened to reduce the need for empty buses to use Parker Street, and a new right turn from Mosley Street into Princess Street, allows routes to avoid the crucial pinch point at the end of Mosley Street.

Mark Threapleton, managing director of Stagecoach Manchester said that these new arrangements "should help". He was mindful of more long term needs to reduce the flow of cars through Portland Street which was contributing to congestion, saying: "The whole basis of pick up points in Piccadilly will have to be looked at again, particularly if the increase in tram runnings shuts off Mosley Street to buses."

GMPTE's Michael Renshaw said that they were introducing a range of practical solutions and hope to see some immediate improvements. "This is equally dependent on all bus operators playing their part," he said.

NatEx review due next year

The results of National Express Group's marketing review will be unveiled early next year.

CBW reported two weeks ago that NatEx bus and coach division bosses Denis Wormwell and Paul Bunting had been seconded to the Group to work on developing a new marketing strategy for the group.

Coach boss Paul Bunting is working with group chief executive Richard Bowker to develop the strategy, while Wormwell will work full time for six months on delivering the project, holding weekly meetings with divisional heads at the bus company. Bunting will continue to work from Birmingham.

NatEx Group is currently recruiting a (non-board level) sales and marketing director. Insiders say suggestions that Wormwell and Bunting will fight it out for the job are wide of the mark.

In an exclusive interview last month, Richard Bowker told *CBW* that the company will look at extending the successful National Express coach brand across all the company's divisions. Speaking to *CBW* last week, Denis Wormwell would not be drawn on what the new strategy might contain, but said the revamp will extend further than a new livery. He said his work involved developing a consistent brand proposition for all the group's activities, and that he would also be looking at other service industries in an effort to improve the customer experience to deliver an 'innovative, new and modern service'.

Briefly

Warwick University will run a hybrid vehicle conference on December 12-13. "It will bring together technical, business and government people in an exciting forum for information exchange and the development of new collaborative relationships," says Adam Willows, from the university. Dr. Stephen Ladyman, minister for transport, and Nick Paul, chairman of Advantage West Midlands will give the keynote speeches. Email hybrids@warwick.ac.uk for more info.

GoSkills' new bus and coach industry careers CD for women has earned the sector skills council a nomination at the Springboard Awards for Excellence. First South Yorkshire, Johnsons Coaches and Hackney Community Transport helped produce the interactive CD. The ceremony will be held at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium in north London today (Wednesday, November 29). GoSkills has also revamped its website, see www.goskills.org.

Scania has again rebuffed MAN's hostile bid saying the offer underestimates the Swedish manufacturer's true value. Investors will receive another special dividend to keep them on side, worth nearly £6.30 per share. The Scania board says MAN's offer underestimates the potential of a long term combination, and overstates the short term benefits. MAN says it will continue to pursue its bid.

New portable finger printing devices were being piloted by transport police in ten forces in England and Wales last week. Drivers are not required to give prints and can request they be removed from the database, in their presence, at the end of the inquiry. Police forces say the system is designed to save time in verifying identification.

Briefly

Travel London has started its new 441 Heathrow to Englefield Green service with four new ADL Darts, fitted with air con, high-back seats and CCTV. BAA has invested £1m in the service which starts at 04:30 Monday – Saturday, and also calls at the Royal Holloway College.

Stoke-on-Trent Council is not supporting services over the festive holiday season, which means residents in the area will be left without bus services on Christmas, Boxing and New Year's days. The last buses on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve will be 20:00. A weekend timetable will operate from December 23 until December 30.

Oxford Bus Company managing director Philip Kirk has hit back at claims that buses are ruining the city's historic High Street. Hotelier Jeremy Mogford, who owns the Old Bank Hotel and Quod restaurant in the street, has said that it is no longer a pleasant place to visit or work with 2,500 buses a day travelling along it. However, Kirk has disputed that there ever was a "golden age of traffic in the High Street" and that there are now less, and cleaner, buses travelling along the road than there were before other traffic was banned from the area seven years ago. Mogford says that he is prepared to fund an independent study of pollution emanating from passing buses.

Banga Travel of Wolverhampton had its 'O' licence revoked by the West Midlands Traffic Commissioner on Thursday. Banga has had a long-running dispute with Centro over the reimbursement of OAP pass revenue, which culminated in the operator refusing to accept the aforementioned passes and display boards to this effect in the front windows. Banga claimed Centro owed it 'considerable' sums of money.

Another First Eastern Counties MD quits

Fifth managing director in six years leaves Norwich

First's Norwich-based Eastern Counties' fifth managing director in the past six years left the group last week for "personal reasons". Keith Andrews, who joined the industry last year from the London Ambulance Service, has been on compassionate leave for some time, and First has now confirmed that whilst he remains within the group's employment, he will not be returning to the post.

His departure comes as an all-party motion to launch an investigation into First Eastern Counties' "substandard" services in Norwich is to be debated at a city council meeting on November 28. The authority has been angered by recent fares revisions which have seen discounted return fares abolished within Norwich.

The council has called on First to "moderate" its fares policies to encourage greater bus use, to co-operate with a proposed investigation into

its Norwich area services to be undertaken by the city council, Norfolk County Council and district councils, and for a bus strategy with "firm and as far as possible enforceable commitments" to improving services in the city.

"[The] council believes that despite the improvements in punctuality and performance recently, First Eastern Counties is providing an inadequate and expensive service using a substandard fleet," ran the motion, tabled by Labour council leader, Steve Morphew. "Recent fares increases disadvantage less well-off people and deter usage of public transport to the detriment of the council's wish to encourage alternative forms of transport other than cars."

Meanwhile, Stephen Smith, managing director at neighbouring First Essex Buses, is currently on extended leave, and it is understood that he may not be returning to the post.

TfL finance chief moves

Transport for London's finance and planning managing director, Jay Walder, is to leave at the end of February after six years with the organisation.

Walder's departure will come as a blow for TfL, which recruited him from the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority in 2000. He has been credited with securing record funding from the government in the 2004 Spending Review that underpins TfL's five-year, £10bn investment plans, and has also delivered massive efficiency savings within the business and led the transport element of the capital's winning bid to host the 2012 Olympics. It is understood that he was bitterly disappointed at missing out on the chance to become TfL commissioner earlier this year when Bob Kiley retired, losing out to



Leaving London: Jay Walder

former surface transport managing director Peter Hendy. He is to join global management consultants McKinsey & Company next year.

London mayor Ken Livingstone paid tribute to Walder's contribution. "Jay has made a huge contribution to transport in London," he said. "His financial expertise unlocked the biggest investment in London's transport in the last 50 years. He has identified £1.26bn of efficiency savings through to 2009/10 which we are able to plough back into improving services."

Eastbourne buses chair survives confidence vote

A motion of no confidence in Eastbourne Buses' chairman, Councillor Patrick Warner, failed last week as the political infighting over the troubled operation continued.

The motion against Warner was brought by Councillor David Tutt, who motioned that 'the council has lost confidence in Patrick Warner due to the lack of information made available to board members and the failure to implement certain board decisions'. The company has been the centre of wrangling since two LibDem councillors resigned from the board last month. Former Stagecoach executive Roger Bowker has returned as caretaker managing director whilst Steve Barnett is on sick leave from the loss-making municipal company in which French group Keolis has a 20% stake.

After the vote, the meeting instead congratulated Warner on his 'strong leadership during a difficult time for the company'. Warner himself promised that "major improvements" would be implemented in the new year.



Solent Blue Line lent one of its brand-new 'Bluestar' ADL Enviro400s to extreme climber Rhys Jones as part of his latest fundraising effort. Jones entered the record books earlier this year as the youngest person ever to climb Mount Everest. He vowed to raise £1 for every foot he climbed then – 29,035ft – for heart disease charity Wessex Heartbeat. To raise the last £5,000 he scaled Solent's latest acquisition last week. The bus company was happy to help although it banned the use of ice picks and crampons. Despite this, Jones climbed the 14ft6in bus in less than a minute. By contrast, his conquest of Everest – the height of 2,002 Enviro – took 54 days. Anyone wishing to sponsor Rhys Jones can make a donation on www.justgiving.com/sevenpeaks and can contact Wessex Heartbeat on 023 8039 4411 if they have a climbing challenge for Rhys to consider.

First concentrates new bus order in six cities

First is to concentrate the bulk of its 2007/08 new bus intake in six cities where it has identified the biggest opportunities for attracting passenger growth. Of the £57m order for 346 new vehicles, which includes the 295-bus order for Volvo/Wrightbus products announced at Euro Bus Expo, 266 are destined for the group's urban bus operations in Bradford (40 double-deck and 15 singles), Bristol (45 deckers), Glasgow (62 deckers), Leeds (30 deckers), Manchester (36 deckers) and South Yorkshire (38 deckers).

As well as the Volvo/Wrightbus order, the group calls for 21 midibuses and seven coaches for 2007/08, with the manufacturers due to be confirmed shortly. The other areas to benefit from the order will be Aberdeen (10 single deck), Berkshire (three coaches), South Wales (14 midibuses), Devon & Cornwall (six midibuses) plus four coaches for National Express contracts. The destinations for the remaining 43 vehicles have yet to be confirmed.

Nicola Shaw, First's UK bus managing director, said the order demonstrated the group's commitment to improving bus services. "Our experience shows that the combination of new vehicles, improved reliability and innovative marketing delivers passenger growth," she said.

■ First has marked the six-month anniversary of its 'ftr' pilot in York by revealing that passenger

numbers on the number 4 route have risen by 26% during the year to September 2006. The second ftr route is due to begin shortly in Leeds.

The ftr route, using Volvo/Wrightbus 'StreetCar' cashless articulated buses, hit some high-profile teething problems in May with reliability problems and technical glitches with the on-board ticket machines. However, passenger numbers in September were 26% higher than they were in September 2005, with overall growth in passenger numbers on the route, between Acomb, the city centre and the university, of 53% since the entire York network received a brand-new fleet of buses in 2002. Sales of ftr and bus tickets through new Paypoint retail outlets in York have meanwhile doubled since September.

First York managing director, Richard Eames, has now promised further improvements to the service, and the operator is currently interviewing for a team of 'customer service hosts' to speed up boarding times during peak periods. The group is also discussing with City of York Council the installation of cash ticket machines at 12 key stops on the route and the introduction of a debit and credit card sales facility at selected stops featuring 'Cityspace' information columns.

"Number 4 was always a service which was performing well, but getting growth on top of that is very encouraging," Eames told the *York Press* earlier this month. "While there have been teething problems that are a matter of record, over the period these issues have been isolated and prioritised. With the work we are already doing, we can hope to be successful in the longer term."

Metro submits case for Leeds BRT

West Yorkshire PTE Metro and Leeds City Council are to submit an initial business case to the government for a high quality bus rapid transit scheme along the proposed route of the Leeds Supertram light rail scheme in the new year.

When the Supertram proposals were turned down by then transport secretary Alistair Darling a year ago, the Department for Transport told Metro and the city council that funding would be made available for an alternative BRT scheme to cover the three lines from the city centre to Headingley, Seacroft and Stourton.

Metro has identified three comparative vehicle types for the scheme, with one option being an electrically-powered bus/tram using overhead wires, at an anticipated cost of £700,000 per vehicle. The PTE is to hold discussions with UK and overseas manufacturers of such vehicles. It is also considering hybrid diesel-electric buses, with an indicative cost of £550,000 each, or a Euro 4 version of a StreetCar-type diesel-engined bus, with a price tag of around £325,000.

Briefly

■ Monmouthshire County Council has successfully applied for a 100% increase in its 'O' licence, taking the fleet to 14 vehicles used on home to school contracts. CBW understands that the council's current fleet includes four 60-seater Alexander Dennis Enviro 300s and three 68-seater Iveco Sclarbuses.

■ First has launched a dedicated service for Glasgow Rangers football fans. After every home game, two services – the X9 and the X54 – will leave Copland Park, with the latter going to Partick Interchange and the other into the city centre.

■ Centro-PTA has expressed its disappointment at the news that Travel West Midlands' 80p and £1.20 flat bus fares are to rise to £1 and £1.40 in the new year. "While we are mindful of the commercial pressures faced by the bus company, any fare increase will make it harder to persuade people to use public transport," said Centro-PTA chairman, Gary Clarke.

■ Most of Luton's bus lanes will soon operate only between 7am and 7pm, with just three remaining 24-hour, due to low bus frequencies in the evening. "The logic of keeping bus lanes private for buses when there are no buses is something that I have difficulties with," said Councillor Sid Rutstein last week.

■ Southampton City Council is to keep a contraflow bus lane in Ruby Road in the Bitterne area of the city despite the fact that the bus route that last used it was withdrawn in March this year. The council claims that keeping the bus lane is vital for traffic management in the area. "The bus lane will stay to keep too many cars from using the road," said a council spokesman.

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A stylized white signature of Tony Turner on a dark blue background.

Tony Turner
Managing Director
Turners Coachways
Bristol



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Five of the best: Crusader Holidays invests in five more new Setras for its 27-strong all-Setra fleet

50th Setra for Crusader

Holiday company happy to stay with German marque

Crusader Holidays has ordered its 50th Setra – the landmark coach will be included in its latest order for four vehicles, on top of five already delivered this year.

The company first started buying the quality German marque ten years ago. Its latest batch comprises two S415 GT HDs and two S416 GT HDs.

Managing director, Michael Holden, says: "That we run an all-Setra fleet is a measure of our satisfaction with both the vehicles and the service we receive.

"If we weren't satisfied we wouldn't keep buying them! Quality is at the heart of our operation – in our drivers, our choice of hotels and in our coaches. That's the key to our continuing success."

Crusader runs a fleet of 27 vehicles. Earlier this

year it took delivery of three S415 GT HDs and two S416 GT HDs.

■ Parks of Hamilton has ordered 25 new Jonckheeres on Volvo B12M chassis, and six Berkhof Axial 100 DD on B12T chassis – all Euro 4 compliant.

The Jonckheeres will arrive in March and are 12.57m with space for 53 passengers. They will have a central demountable toilet, air conditioning, fridge, drinks facility and TV/ DVD.

The 13.5m Berkhof Axials are also a new departure for Parks. The 13.5m coaches have 83 seats, air-con, drinks facilities, toilet and full audio-visual system with multiple DVD monitors.

The Jonckheeres have the 420bhp Volvo DH12E engine and the Berkhofs the 460bhp version. Both will have I-Shift.

All the vehicles will be used for private hire,

Stagecoach and Virgin relaunch airport service

The Stagecoach-operated Virgin Trains ExpressCoach service linking Milton Keynes and Luton Airport has been relaunched with six new accessible Plaxton Profiles.

Built on the Euro 3 Volvo B7R chassis, the coaches have space for 49 passengers, and a wheelchair lift incorporated into the front entrance. The vehicles also feature air conditioning, seatbelts, interior and exterior CCTV.

James Freeman, Stagecoach East managing director, says: "These coaches are a real boost for the service. Besides being fully accessible, they provide the ultimate in comfort and security for the thousands of customers who use the service every year. In the last month the service has clocked up over 600,000 passengers since its launch in 1999 and we now intend to introduce additional journeys during peak weekday periods from mid-January next year."

Operated from Stagecoach East's Bedford depot with a dedicated team of uniformed drivers, the VT99 connects hourly with Virgin's long-distance Pendolino services at Milton Keynes. Some 146,000 journeys are made each year, three-quarters of which are for leisure purposes.

Virgin Rail group is owned 51% by Virgin Rail, and 49% by Stagecoach. Stagecoach East has 317 buses and coaches. National Express operates the other Virgin ExpressCoach service, the half-hourly VT98 from Watford Junction to Heathrow Airport.

Motorway services study

The DfT is consulting on changes to service areas on motorways in England.

But the long-standing requirement that motorway service areas should not become destinations in their own right will remain unchanged, it says.

Minister for Roads, Dr Stephen Ladyman, said: "I have launched a public consultation on roadside facilities on England's strategic road network. The consultation lasts for 12 weeks and comprises a call for evidence on a number of issues for consideration, with a view to improving services for road users."

In particular, the document

seeks views on the location of motorway service areas – MSAs – determining the need for such sites and the spacing interval between them; the facilities at MSAs, service areas on trunk roads, motorway picnic areas, and the provision and use of laybys.

Draft guidance will be issued before the new policy is published. See www.dft.gov.uk for more details.

Meanwhile, the UK's biggest motorway service operator, Moto, is investing £30m in an upgrade of its sites. WH Smith will replace Moto's own-branded retail shops, and more Marks and Spencer 'Simply Food' shops will be opened.



Virgin/National Express gets relaunched. This isn't Luton Airport, incidentally...

Mentor to sell new MAN multi-seat option Maxim2

The new multi-seat option MAN Indcar Maxim 2 is now available to order from Mentor Coach and Bus in Rotherham, following its debut at the recent Euro Bus Expo.

The new MAN chassis has increased the seating options on the Maxim2. As well as the 35-seat model, the 31+1+1 seat option offers luxurious legroom while still providing a cost-effective payload. Other options include 33+1+1, and a 27+1+1 option with two tables. Wheelchair spaces are also planned for 2007.

The midicoach is powered by the 225bhp MAN10.225 FOCL engine via a ZF Ecolite manual gearbox. Ride comfort comes through spring and air suspension with electronic levelling, and the Maxim 2 has disc brakes all round with ABS.

Air conditioning is standard, as is a radio, CD, PA and a DVD with monitor. An extensive list of options includes metallic paint, towing hook and refrigerator.

Luggage space is one of the largest in its class with a generous 5m³ with side access and a cavernous rear locker, especially useful for airport work or touring.



The choice is yours: Maxim 2 has multi-seat options

Boom times at Stansted

A 3.8% fall in the number of passengers travelling to Stansted by train this year masks a 250% growth in the number of passengers using coaches to get to the airport over the last five years, according to the latest statistics from the Civil Aviation Authority.

People using Stansted have grown by 5% in the last year but the number of passengers arriving by train and by car fell between 2004 and 2005. Anti-expansion campaigners are using these figures to support their campaign. A spokesman for Stop Stansted Expansion says: "Local people need very

little reminding about the growth in road congestion or of the overcrowding on many of our train services to London arising from the rapid expansion of the airport in recent years."

But BAA hit back last week, saying the airport is committed to public transport use. Passengers arriving by bus and coach increased by 200,000 to 7.5m last year. Stansted opened a £2.5m bus and coach station this year.

"We are number one in the UK, and take great pride in our record of achievement," said a spokesman. "Our opponents prefer to snipe from the sidelines, and set out to completely mislead the public by ignoring the vital role bus and coach plays in providing public transport alternatives at Stansted."

Insurance selling under microscope

The sale of holiday insurance will be subject to a government review amid fears that customers are being mis-sold policies.

The Treasury Select Committee is conducting an investigation into the scope of the Financial Services Authority insurance regulation and heard evidence from the Treasury, the Association of British Insurers and ABTA last week.

Economic secretary to the Treasury, Ed Balls, said that many customers expected their policies to cover emergency medical treatment and repatriation, but "only 50% of policies provide such cover. In recent years, there have been growing concerns from consumer groups and sections of the industry, that the market is not working as well as it could, raising questions about whether regulation and appropriate redress should apply to the selling of travel insurance. We therefore need to get to the bottom of whether travel insurance sold with a holiday is being mis-sold."

Travel insurance was exempted from scrutiny by the FSA when it took on responsibility for the sale of insurance in 2005. Insurance sellers in other parts of the industry are now required to make a lengthy set of disclosures to customers to make sure that policies are understood.

First Divo in UK

Esker Bus and Coach (UK) has confirmed the first order for a DAF SB4000-based Divo coach has been taken from Stewarts of Mortimer.

Andy Cotton of the Berkshire-based operation saw it in 12.8 metre and 57-seat format and was so impressed he decided to buy it.

He said: "I thought the styling was stunning with very smooth lines and I was equally impressed with the build quality. I know a number have been in operation on the continent for a while and that Esker (Ireland) has already supplied over half a dozen this year without any serious hiccups."

Esker general manager, Alan White, said: "We will be announcing further sales of the new model following a high level of interest."

Briefly

The Irish Director of Public Prosecutions decided on Monday as CBW went to press to downgrade the charges against the Dualway driver who ran amok in Dublin earlier this year. He was initially charged with murder after killing a female car driver, but he will now face a charge of manslaughter.

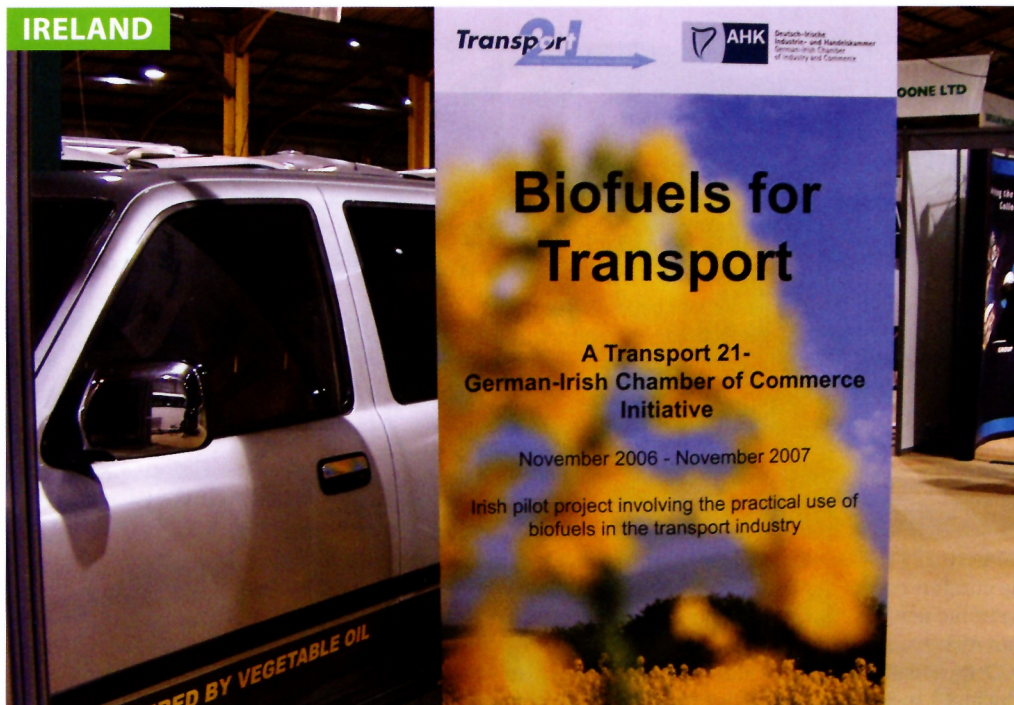
Peter and Pam Reynolds, from Peter Reynolds Coaches in Northwood, Middex, were the lucky winners of bus and coach finance specialists Hansar's European City Break draw at Euro Bus Expo. They and are looking forward to a trip to Belgium in spring.

Councillors in the Coquet Valley, Northumberland, have vowed that tenders for school contracts will not just be decided on price. Chairman Trevor Thorne says: "It's got to be about safety, not just about pounds, shillings and pence."

Parents in East Renfrewshire are kicking up a fuss because anti-child abuse regulations mean they are not allowed aboard school buses in the morning. One parent has taken legal advice over the requirement to have clearance from Disclosure Scotland to board the bus and fasten the seatbelt of her special needs child.

A survey from insurers More Than says Brits are due to go travel-mad this winter as a quarter of the working population still has ten or more days' holiday remaining. Over 20% say they intend to book late breaks. Top European destinations are Spain, France and Italy.

The table used by VOSA staff when assessing operator reports for the purpose of the Operator Compliance Risk Score (OCRS) system can be viewed at the government's 'Transport Office' website (www.transportoffice.gov.uk). The table lists the number of points given to each defect found at annual test or roadside check.



Going green: Transport 21 has pledged to pay up to 75% of the cost for modification for plant fuel

Transport 21 launches plant oil fuel initiative

DoT plans unveiled at Coach & Bus show in Dublin

A new Transport 21 initiative plans to have around 50 commercial vehicles, including PSVs, running on pure renewable plant oil before the end of 2007.

The biofuels project was launched at the 2006 Coach & Bus show in the RDS (see page 42).

The project is being run by the Department of Transport and the German-Irish chamber of commerce, and is the first pilot of its kind.

Under Transport 21, which is the Government's €34.4 billion transport investment plan, there is funding available for 75% of the price of engine modification kits for commercial vehicles to enable them to use renewable biofuels.

"Pure plant oil technology is used all over the EU and Ireland now has the opportunity to benefit from the experience of other countries, and establish a sustainable biofuels for transport industry," said Ralf Lissek, CEO of the German-Irish chamber of commerce.

A spokesman for the project told *CBW* that they would welcome applications under the scheme from coach and bus operators of any size.

"Ideally we want to have as wide a range of vehicles as possible in terms of size, so we will welcome minibus operators as well as those running large coaches, lorries and double-deck buses," he added.

50% of drivers will never switch to bus – DTO survey

A new survey conducted for the Dublin Transportation Office (DTO) indicates that 50% of all car drivers in the Greater Dublin area would not switch to travelling by bus, even if services were improved.

Unreliability, long waiting times and poor connections were cited by survey respondents as the main reasons for not taking the bus, as well as a perceived lack of access to information.

More than 35% of those surveyed were satisfied with the quality and upkeep of roads, and with facilities for cycling.

More than a half said they were happy with the reliability, frequency and cost of buses.

The DTO survey saw just under 2,500 people questioned, and a similar number of travel diaries were compiled.

Results indicated that the car is the main form of transport in the region, used by 45% of respondents, while 18% relied on the bus and 16% said walking was their main form of transport.

Just 2% used the Luas more often than other modes of transport, and 3% used the DART or local train. Two per cent cycled and 1% relied on taxis.

Of those who said they might switch to the bus, over 60% said more frequent services was the main change needed. Accurate timetables and stops closer to destinations were also called for.

Respondents linked transport by car to comfort, convenience and reliability. In contrast, buses were viewed as being for older people and people with no other choice.

Bus transport was favourably viewed for going out socially and for being reasonably priced.

The Luas was seen as modern, while DART and train services were viewed as fast and safe.

Cycling and walking were viewed as healthy and environmentally friendly, but mainly for the younger age groups.

Operation Freeflow launches for Christmas

Dublin City Council, the Garda and major transport operators have teamed up to launch the annual "Operation Freeflow" in the Greater Dublin area. Extra gardai are being temporarily taken from training and will be used to keep major bus corridors, junctions and tramway routes clear, and there will be enhanced timetables, extra night buses, and greater security on late night services. All non-essential roadworks in the region are cancelled, with the exception of the M50 upgrade project. Operation Freeflow runs

until January 7.

"As the Assistant Garda Commissioner in charge of the Dublin Metropolitan Region, I am delighted to launch Operation Freeflow 2006," Garda Al McHugh told *CBW*. "An Garda Síochána is vital to the smooth running of Operation Freeflow."

"This year, motor cycle personnel, mobile patrols, the Garda Mounted Unit, the Mountain Bike Unit and the Garda Air Support Unit will augment the beat personnel dedicated to Operation Freeflow. 163 extra

probationer gardai from the Garda College in Templemore will be deployed to support existing resources. They will be allocated throughout the Dublin region, concentrating their efforts on major junctions and well-known traffic black spots.

"Freeflow enforcement activities commences at 06:30 each morning. There are CCTV cameras on all Nitelink Buses. In addition, An Garda Síochána will maintain a monitoring presence on late night public transport during Freeflow," he added.

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Mercedes-Benz

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www.evobus.co.uk

Briefly

Volvo Buses has received an order for 20 Volvo B7RLE citybuses from Auckland operator Infratil Public Transport. The company has opted for Euro 5 engines, not mandatory in New Zealand until 2012. The order is a breakthrough for Volvo as the company has previously sold little other than coaches in the country for some years. The chassis for the buses will be manufactured in Volvo Buses' plant in Borås, Sweden, while Designline in New Zealand will make the bodies.

Citybus and First New World Bus will spend HK\$4m installing rear view cameras on 1,600 vehicles after a spate of rear ender accidents, which now account for over 1% of all accidents in the former colony.

DaimlerChrysler has reiterated its desire to break into the Indian bus market. At the launch of Mercedes-Benz's E Class car last week, DC India's ceo Wilfried Aulbur said the company saw India as the 'next China' and was looking at the possibility of entering the market for buses and trucks. "We clearly see India as an important part of our strategy," he told reporters.

Chinese manufacturer Zonda Bus is investigating a JV assembly plant in Pakistan. A delegation was received at the home of the Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz last Friday. He says the Chinese private sector is welcome to invest in his country's thriving transportation business, and that it is fully open to foreign investment. Zonda recently signed an agreement to build a factory in Turkey.

A JV between Russian and Ethiopian manufacturers will see a new trolley bus factory opening in the north of Ethiopia. Rus Afro-trol and Afro Asian Trading Enterprise will own 30% and 70% respectively.

Bus-Way running Mercedes-Benz Citaro G artics in Nantes

Twenty unique versions of Mercedes-Benz's Citaro G artics have taken to the streets of the southern French city Nantes. The vehicles will ply a new dedicated mass transit scheme in the city, developed by the municipal authority and operated by Bus-Way.

The vehicles feature unique bodywork to enhance the tram-like appearance of the new service, which had a ceremonial launch earlier this month. Panels stretch over the roof to disguise the gas tanks on the CNG-powered vehicles, and the bellows between the cars have been extended to this increased height.

The long downward extension of the wheel-arch trim on the centre and rear axles, and the double-glazed, venus green-tinted side windows also give a tram-like appearance.

Maple wood ceiling trim above the central aisle gives the interior a luxurious feel, as do recessed LED spotlights which divide the interior into three distinct areas by colour: the front is illuminated in yellow, the centre in white and the rear in blue. Polished aluminium LED uplighters at selected window pillars round off the special lighting effect. The interior is monitored by six CCTV cameras.

Like on Wrightbus' StreetCar the driver's work-

place is isolated from the passenger compartment. The driver accesses this 'driver's cabin' via the first wing of the door. A partition separates this entrance completely from the entrance for passengers, who access the vehicle via the second wing. Doors two and three are fitted with truncated ramps: when the fold-and-slide doors are opened by the passenger the ramps automatically extend within two seconds.

In addition to the usual route number and destination equipment, further passenger information is provided by four illuminated route maps displayed at ceiling height, four 15-inch TFT screens and four LED-lit advertisement panels delivering travel information, advertising and news.

The Bus-Way Citaros are powered by Mercedes-Benz M 447 hLAG natural gas engines with an output of 240 kW (326bhp). The CNG fuel is stored at 200 bar in the eight tanks on the roof of the vehicle. These have a combined capacity of 1,520 litres - sufficient for a full working day. Gear changes are made via a six-speed automatic transmission.

The Citaro Gs were ordered for the number 4 route, and connect the 15 stops along the eight-kilometre route between Nantes and Porte de Vertou in less than 20 minutes. Bus stop infrastructure along route 4 has been modified with kerbs raised to 270mm, ensuring virtually level access for passengers.

The Nantes authority is made up of 24 boroughs which joined forces to implement a plan to strengthen the region and its economy, a key part of which involves upgrading local public transport. Bus-Way is the first joint project in Nantes and is designed to promote public transport routes.

At present the three tram lines which cover the route to the city centre carry around 240,000 passengers a day, primarily commuters. It is expected that around 25,000 passengers a day will use the Bus-Way route 4 to travel into the city.



Unique Mercedes-Benz Citaro Gs for Nantes

Only Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel for Canada

The biggest change to fuel since unleaded petrol hit the pumps 25 years ago has occurred for all diesel fuel offered in Canada.

In line with new regulations set to come into force for North America in 2007, set by the US Environmental Protection Agency, Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel (ULSD) is to become the dominant fuel for diesel-powered equipment, including buses and coaches. Requirements are for new diesel engines designed to run exclusively on ULSD. As

the 2007 deadline draws near, manufacturer Motor Coach Industries (MCI) is one of the first on board with a new, cleaner engine. The company launched its new prototype last week at the Ontario Motorcoach Association Annual Conference and Marketplace in Toronto. It is based on MCI's top-selling J4500 model equipped with a 2007 Caterpillar C-13 ACERT engine and 12-speed ZF AS-Tronic transmission. The drive train in combination with ULSD fuel (up

to 15ppm) and a Diesel Particulate Filter in the exhaust are said to reduce emissions by up to 90%. Conventional diesel fuel with up to 500ppm sulphur content will remain available at garage forecourts until December 1, 2010. After then, only ULSD will be available for highway use.

MCI says from a marketing perspective, ULSD fuel and the new engines present a new opportunity to promote the positive impact coach travel has on the environment.

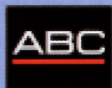
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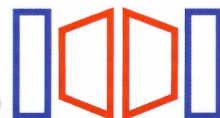
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5th Annual Conference

School Transport 2007

Thursday 25th January 2007, Central London

Speakers include:

Penny Jones

Co-Chair, Travelling to School Initiative, DfES

Nigel Campbell

Co-Chair, Travelling to School Initiative, DfT

Tim Davies

Lead for Training and Development, Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO)

John Hodgkins

Transport and Accessibility Manager, Buckinghamshire County Council, and Chairman, ATCO

Paul Osborne

Director, Safe Routes to Schools Project, Sustrans

Chris Waterman

Executive Director, Confed

This annual conference comes at a crucial time for school transport services. There is a whole raft of recent and forthcoming government legislation and policy which will greatly impact upon how school travel is planned and delivered.

In the coming months the Education and Inspections Bill will be passed and will create new requirements to provide sustainable modes of transport, new arrangements for eligible children and promote choice and diversity. The Local Government White Paper will require services to be delivered efficiently and to respond to its users needs. The DfT's Efficiency Action Plan will provide guidance on new joined-up approaches to efficient school travel planning. The conference will look at how to support other services to meet requirements within Youth Matters and Every Child Matters, such as providing travel for Extended Schools and enabling children and young people to access leisure and cultural activities.

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Briefly

A young mum says the bus station in Grantham has become "grotty" with overflowing bins since the public toilets opened at Abbey Gardens. Lisa Smith said her two-and-a-half year old daughter Kaitlin put her hand in sick at the bus station last week.

Passengers who use Metro's rural service 923 between Wetherby and Otley are benefiting from the introduction of a new vehicle on the service. Funded by Metro, and run by local operator Utopia, the service is now using a new, easy-access, low-floor, step-free bus, which can also carry wheelchair passengers.

A disabled man, angry at the rudeness of a Slough bus driver, is planning to complain to his local MP. Michael Johnson, who has to walk with a stick, said an Arriva driver tried to close the door on him as he went on board, then proceeded to berate him for being slow. Arriva has apologised for any upset caused, but the driver denies being rude.

Pedestrians in Sutton complaining they were regularly showered by smelly liquid poured from the top deck of a bus were among the first to access a new shop-a-job scheme. The project, which allows commuters to report vandalism on buses via text message, was launched just last week. But has already enabled a police investigation into allegations of anti-social behaviour waged from one Sutton school bus.

A bus full of British tourists travelling in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil was robbed at gunpoint on Sunday, November 26. At least 18 tourists who had just arrived in the city had their luggage, passports and cash stolen by four men armed with automatic rifles and military-issue grenades. One tourist was hit on the head with a rifle, but is not believed to be seriously hurt.



The ProGuard CCTV system

Queens award for 21st Century CCTV

Twenty-First Century's industry-leading ProGuard CCTV system has been awarded the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise. The system received the award in the Innovation category, which recognises companies that have demonstrated commercial success through innovative products.

Paul Rogers, sales and marketing director for 21st Century, said there is still more to come from ProGuard: "We are delighted that the technology behind our ProGuard system has been recognised through this prestigious Award. We know that the system is still capable of much more and we are currently developing new technologies which will further enhance it."

The system uses WiFi capability and automatically downloads digital images from bus CCTV cameras. This is supported by Heartbeat, a WiFi maintenance tool that provides a 24-hour automated system monitor so operators can always be confident that their CCTV is working correctly. The ProGuard has also been combined with GPS to monitor speed and vehicle location, connectivity to brakes, indicators and tachometer, and the ability can connect to buses on the road via live voice calls and text messaging.

Fuel price and environment good news for the bus?

A survey of 2,500 adults carried out this autumn by consultants Trueform has found that a substantial proportion are using the bus more often due to concerns over fuel prices and the environment, or are considering doing so in the future.

Of those surveyed, 30% said that rising fuel prices are causing them to look for new ways to reduce their car use, whilst a further 23% said they intended to reduce car use because of the impact on the environment. More significantly, 46% said they were now using the bus as often, or more frequently than they did two years ago, twice the percentage that said they were now using the bus less. Of those now using the bus more, 35% said they did so because of the relatively low cost of fares, 30% cited better, more frequent services and 26% said they liked the green credentials of the bus.

"While government attempts to leave cars at home have generally not had a large impact, this study suggests that when car use starts to hit people in their pockets or taps their social consciousness, then change can and will be initiated," said Trueform's technical director Jonathan Morley.

RMT calls for targets to combat climate change

The Rail Maritime Transport Workers (RMT) union has this week proposed an eight-point action plan to harness the ability of public transport to help combat global warming.

The union has called for the introduction of statutory targets for modal shift from cars and air travel to surface public transport, and for the Climate Change Bill to include three-year targets for cutting carbon emissions for transport.

It wants the Department for Transport to publish a carbon emission reduction strategy; regulated and simplified bus and rail fares to encourage modal shift; ringfenced funding to increase public transport capacity from road-charging revenues; increased research into carbon-efficient

vehicles; a review of the government's road-building and airport expansion plans; and new legislation to give trade union environmental representatives the same rights as industrial and health and safety reps.

"A Climate Change Bill is an important first step, but Britain will only be able to meet its climate change challenge if policy measures are introduced that will get people out of cars and planes and onto trains, buses and trams," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said last week.

"The joined-up transport network the environment needs must also mean an end to the damaging fragmentation brought about by bus deregulation and rail privatisation," he added.

BVRLA campaigns over minibus threat

The British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (BVRLA) says it is concerned about the effect of new regulations making tachographs compulsory in minibuses from next April.

It says its members will not be

in a position to judge whether or not customers - sports and community clubs for instance - fall 'in scope' of the legislation and consequently whether they need, or are familiar with, tachographs and drivers hours.

The BVRLA is also concerned that many minibuses do not have electronic sender units fitted to gearboxes that digital tachographs need, and the knock on effect this would have on residual values.

£10m investment for Victorian Town

West Midlands' Blists Hill gets Euro cash

One of the West Midlands most historic tourist attractions is set to get a major transformation thanks to a £10m grant from Advantage West Midlands and the European Regional Development Fund.

Blists Hill Victorian Town is the flagship visitor attraction within the Ironbridge Gorge, the West Midlands' only World Heritage Site. It is internationally recognised for its accurate interpretation of the trades of a small manufacturing and mining town at the end of the Victorian era.

The Ironbridge Gorge Museum has been working on the project for several years and has consulted with partners throughout the Gorge, including Telford & Wrekin Council and the World Heritage Site Strategy Group. The project involves a series of major investments over the next 18 months and is aimed at bringing in an additional 100,000 visitors a year.

Mark Pearce is partnerships director at Advantage West Midlands, who awarded £6.5m to the project. He said: "Ironbridge Gorge is the region's only World Heritage Site and as such it is vital that we develop and invest in this wonderful site to preserve it for future generations and to promote it to a worldwide audience.

"Tourism is vital to the economic well-being of the region and is a growing sector of the regional economy – each year, 124 million visits generate £4.8 billion. With the eyes of the world on the UK in six years' time for London 2012, investing in attractions like Blists Hill now means that they will be well equipped to handle an influx of tourists before, during and after the Games."

The first project will be the construction of a new entrance and visitor centre to the museum, which will include a café and shop with good disabled access. This will be a landmark building designed to give visitors an introduction to the entire gorge, with an interpretation centre putting into perspective the importance of the mining and metal-working industries, which underpinned the industrial revolution and flourished in the valley for several hundred years.

Additional space for car parking and park-and-ride services will also be added so that Blists Hill can effectively play its part in attracting visitors to the valley and helping them to find their way to all the other attractions with the minimum of traffic movement.

There is also a plan to revive one of the narrow gauge railways that were extensively used in the mineral industries of the gorge a century ago. The track will follow the Blists Hill canal and link up with an incline plane lift to take visitors to and from the lower green halfway down the site. This will provide an attractive circuit within Blists Hill making the most of the site, including a new mining exhibit accessible to all visitors.

Four or five new shops will be added at the top of the town while a cluster of manufacturing workshops will expand the commercial activities, strengthening the Victorian streetscape and canal basin.

Finally, the infrastructure of the whole site will be improved from road surfaces to the draining and extension of the 'Village Green' to provide a larger area for the museum's popular special events and fairs.

Awards for Drayton Manor

Drayton Manor has concluded its 2006 season by winning a host of awards.

The Staffordshire-based theme park won the prestigious accolade of Best UK Attraction in the Group Leisure Awards, which are voted for by readers of the *Group Leisure* magazine.

They were also finalists for the Group Leisure Best UK Attraction for Children award, which they have now won every year since 2003, and Group Leisure Best UK Value Destination.

DEALS OF THE WEEK

■ Newcastle's Centre For Life offers excellent deals for group visits including priority admission, discounted entry, free coach parking and a free driver meal. The centre promotes the discovery and understanding of the world through scientific exhibitions, demonstrations and shows in a unique dome theatre. Groups must have ten people or more to be valid for discounts and advance booking is necessary. Call 0191 243 8210 (info)/8223 (booking).

■ TLH Leisure Resort is a wonderful location for group holidays, situated in the heart of Torquay and surrounded by the delightful scenery of Devon and Cornwall. TLH is currently offering one free

place for every 30 bookings, two for 50 and three for 80 and over. Familiarisation visits can be arranged for group organisers, which includes a free trip around the bay and local attractions. Contact 01803 400500 for further details.

■ Groups can discover both sides of Oxford's history with a discounted joint ticket to visit the Oxford Story and Unlocked – Oxford Castle. The joint ticket offers groups a £2 discount per person meaning a visit to both attractions will cost just £9.75 for adults and £8.50 for seniors. The Oxford Story focuses on the history of the university and Unlocked – Oxford Castle looks at the last 1,000 years in the city. Group bookings on 08702 411414.

Below: Centre For Life



Riding high: Colin Bryan, managing director of Drayton Manor Theme Park

Rob Yandell, publisher of *Group Leisure*, said: "Having won our Best UK Attraction for Children award for the past three years, it was interesting

to see Drayton Manor confirm its wider appeal by winning the Best UK Attraction category in 2006. It demonstrates that Drayton Manor continually re-invents itself with new and exciting rides and attractions that everyone can enjoy."

Drayton Manor also won the Silver Award in the Large Visitor Attraction category at the Heart of England Excellence in Tourism Awards as well as UK Attraction of the Year at the Coach Tourism Awards.

Colin Bryan, MD of Drayton Manor Theme Park said: "I am very proud of this magnificent achievement which recognises the hard work, innovation and dedication which has been at the forefront of our business for many years."

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Netherlands	72.22
Poland	71.79
Czech Republic	71.39
Portugal	70.61
Austria	69.42
Luxembourg	62.42
Spain	60.11



Laurence and Christine Smith of Drusillas with Teri Ruffley, HIT director (left)

Thomas (and friends) steam into Drusillas Park

HIT Entertainment, one of the world's leading pre-school children's entertainment producers and rights owners, has announced a long-term deal to install a permanent Thomas the Tank Engine attraction within Drusillas Park in Sussex. The attraction, set to open at Easter 2007, will transport visitors around the park daily. Visitors will be able to see some characters from Thomas' World on their journey and occasionally meet the Fat Controller. The attraction will offer Thomas fans the chance to take a journey with the famous old train the whole year round.

Drusillas will be the first UK

location to have Thomas & Friends as a permanent visitor attraction, and directors Laurence and Christine Smith are confident it will boost visitor numbers and enhance their visitors' enjoyment of the park.

"Since we acquired Drusillas ten years ago we have invested heavily in the park and have been pleased with the steady increase in visitor numbers and the customer satisfaction ratings, but we think Thomas will make a huge difference because he is just so popular with our target audience - the two to eight-year-olds," said Laurence Smith.

Ironbridge announced as Icon of England

When the Ironbridge - the world's first bridge made of iron - was built in 1779 over the River Severn, no-one could have predicted it would become a national treasure 227 years later. But its iconic status has been confirmed and it is included in a new list of 21 sites in England announced by ICONS - A Portrait of England, which is compiling an online collection of the country's icons at www.icons.org.uk.

The Icons project, which launched in January, now includes 74 official icons of England which have been given

the star treatment online with themed in-depth features, quizzes, video clips and interviews on the site. Funded initially by Culture Online, part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, ICONS has attracted more than 700 nominations, with over 800,000 people logging on to the site.

Constructed of solid iron girders supported on two stone abutments, the Ironbridge represented a major turning point in the industrial revolution. Abraham Darby and his family had always operated a small ferry at



Icon: Ironbridge

the site and Abraham's grandson proposed the idea of building a river bridge from the iron smelted locally.

Prior to this, bridges had always been built from stone or wood.

Once built, it became a symbol of progress and technical mastery and people travelled from all over the world to see this man-made wonder.

A toll-keeper was employed to collect money from people crossing the bridge each day.

However, it later became quite cheap to cross the river because tolls could only be increased by Parliament, which is why, until 1950, pedestrians were still only being charged a halfpenny to cross.

"The Ironbridge has been regarded as an international icon for centuries and it is fitting that it has now been recognised," said Steve Miller, chief executive of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.

Briefly

Reports in the Australian press over the weekend warned travellers about the supposed dangers of holidaying in Britain. Although the Australian government rates the UK as in the second lowest category of risk, despite it now being the prime western target for jihadists, travel writers don't necessarily agree. A Sydney newspaper reported: "The industry is concerned that, given the number of things that have happened in the UK, the travel advisory is inadequate."

Hotel chain Travelodge has warned the government it needs to make urgent changes to its tourism policy if the 2012 Olympic Games - to be staged in London and elsewhere - are to become a lasting success. Among the number of changes recommended were the appointment of a full-time tourism minister for proper leadership and confirmation that bed tax will not be levied on tourists during the games.

Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk is applying for world heritage status in a bid to boost its tourism and showcase the market town's wealth of Grade 1 listed buildings. The local MP, David Ruffley, said he would be writing to the Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, urging Bury to be placed on the government's list of nominations for special status.

Sunny Crouch, the woman hired by Portsmouth council bosses in the 1980s to promote the town's tourism potential, has been rewarded with an OBE. Sunny decided to lock into the naval heritage of the town and re-brand Portsmouth as the 'flagship of maritime England', a logo that has stuck with the town since. After the ceremony Sunny said: "It is such an honour and a real thrill to be recognised for a career dedicated to improving local economies."

Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk

WALES

Newport Transport and **Stagecoach** in South Wales buses are now allowed to travel via the lower part of Stow Hill, then Westgate Square, then Skinner Street, to access Newport bus station throughout the day.

This route is currently unavailable between 11:00 and 17:00 Monday-Saturday, as Westgate Square is considered part of the pedestrianised city centre.

The re-routing is to avoid severe congestion between the Old Green roundabout and the bus station, which occurs as a result of the road works in Kingsway. Buses have typically been delayed by 15 to 20 minutes.

NORTH

Robbers held a young boy at gunpoint before stealing his mother's car and crashing it into a bus in Ladybarn, Greater **Manchester**. The boy – who was diagnosed with a brain tumour last year – was sitting in the BMW X5 as his mother vacuumed it at a petrol station. Three men approached, held a gun at the boy's head and snatched the keys. They drove off with the car's bonnet still up, crashed into another car before hitting the bus in Ladybarn Lane, Ladybarn. The men were not masked and may have been caught on CCTV.

■ Parents are giving up sending their children to school on the bus as the fares have gone up too much, a Lancashire MP has said.

Nigel Evans said recent fare rises – which saw the half rate scrapped for children – is forcing youngsters off public transport and into the back of their parents' cars. He spoke out in the House of Commons following the recent decision by **Preston Bus** to ditch the reduced price ticket for under-16s and replace it with a 60p minimum, the same as for adults.

It came hot on the heels of a decision by Lancashire County Council to raise the cost of riding on school buses.

■ Work has started on clearing the site for Rochdale's new £11.5m Transport Interchange, despite the full funding not yet being secure. Rochdale Regeneration Agency obtained £1.5m towards the project from the Single Regeneration Budget while **GMPTA** submitted a bid for the remainder to the DfT last month, with the backing of the North West Regional Assembly. It says it hopes the funding will be approved in the next few months.

■ Police have described a proposal to ban congregating youths from **Otley**

bus station as unworkable. They say it would merely push the problems to elsewhere in the town. There are difficulties moving youths on from the station because they say they are waiting for a bus. Passengers have complained about being intimidated by gangs of up to 30 youths. The police say they are working to isolate the ringleaders and find something else for the others to do.

MIDLANDS

Centro is piloting a travel planning scheme with community and faith groups to encourage travel by sustainable means. Each group will be issued with a free, web-based portal bespoke to each organisation which will provide public transport information, including RTPI and multi-modal timetables for services that operate nearby, as well as electronic journey planners.

Also available are tailored travel packs, details of free and discounted travel, information on ring and park and ride, plus support for cycling, walking, community transport and car sharing initiatives.

Centro says the plan is being watched by local authorities across the country and if successful will be rolled out nationwide.

■ **Arriva Midlands** is raising fare prices on many routes by between 10p and 30p per single journey. The company says increased energy prices, insurance and employment costs have forced the increase. A spokesman said: "We have reached the point where we must pass on additional costs for the services to remain sustainable."

■ Labour MP, Keith Vaz, called a public meeting to try and sort out a



PSV driver and Transport Management graduate Gareth Evans – not Gareth Davies as we wrote two weeks ago – is our Wales correspondent. To get in contact with him you need to email gareth.evans@rouncymedia.co.uk or phone 0777 261 2425.



row between furious residents and Leicester City Council over bus stops.

Temporary bus stop signs appeared overnight, without warning, on lamp-posts outside peoples' homes in the Hamilton area of the city. The signs were put up by the council to serve new **Arriva** routes.

Over 50 angry residents turned up at the meeting to hear Mr Vaz say: "Residents are furious they weren't consulted. This is a ham-fisted attempt to provide better public transport. In 20 years as an MP this is the worst example of officialdom riding roughshod over ordinary people."

An Arriva spokesman said it was up to the council where to put stops. A Leicester City Council spokesman said: "all concerns that have been raised will be taken into account."

LONDON

Nearly 3,000 people have signed an online petition to ban passengers playing loud music on-board London buses. Supporters apparently include Mayor Ken Livingstone, and definitely the Conservative leader of the London Assembly, Roger Evans – although both **TfL** and the **TGWU** have expressed misgivings. The petition was set up earlier this month by two passengers from East London.

Mayor Livingstone is said to favour an "absolute" ban and Mr Evans was one of the first to sign.

He will present it to TfL commissioner, Peter Hendy, at a December meeting of the London Assembly, after which there will be a

Briefly

■ **Police have arrested a man who allegedly aimed a gun at a moving bus in Bolton last week. Pedestrians saw the man point the weapon at a packed bus on the outskirts of the town. Earlier he had allegedly aimed it at a female passer-by.**

■ **Luton's bus lanes will now be operational for just 12 hours a day. Councillors heard that just one bus per hour was using the lanes after 7pm. The original plan had been to rationalise the number of lanes in the city and open them up to motorbikes, but councillors balked at the cost of £5-10,000 for each lane. The council will now decide whether to take over enforcement from the police.**

Briefly

■ A parish council has turned down a developer's offer of free bus shelters because it fears they will become meeting points for local youths. George Wimpey offered to pay for and maintain five shelters for 10 years as part of a planning application in Hethersett, Norfolk.

■ A north London councillor was forced to confront the worst of passenger behaviour when teenage girls started fighting on the Arriva operated W3 bus. Cllr Ron Aitken (Crouch End) intervened after one girl had her head slammed against the window. "I was shocked - there was blood all over the bus," he said.

■ A motorist died and four others were injured after a crash between a car and a bus in Tamworth, Staffs. The accident happened on Lichfield Road last Monday night. The road was closed for five hours.

■ Devon and Cornwall police gave a £475 grant to a youth club to decorate a bus shelters in Hatherleigh. They painted the shelter with scenes depicting night and day in the town.



Torfaen AM Lynne Neagle joined Stagecoach in South Wales MD John Gould to launch its latest new buses - 14 new Darts that will operate on an enhanced X24 service, branded "justgo..." between Blaenavon and Newport, every 10 minutes Monday to Saturday (daytime) and every hour on Sundays and holidays. X24 carries over 900,000 passengers a year and is the fastest-growing bus route in Wales. Lynne Neagle said: "The X24 service enhancement is an exciting project for South East Wales, which will revitalise a significant key route in the area's bus network."

vote on the issue.

TfL says any such ban would be unenforceable, while the TGWU is concerned for its drivemembers. "Drivers are being asked to become policemen, which could potentially leave them vulnerable to assault," said the union.

■ The park and ride service to Bromley town centre from south-east London started its seasonal run last Saturday and will run daily until the year end, apart from Christmas and Boxing Day.

Metrobus has been awarded the contract and will use **Dart SLF** single deckers operating from Orpington.

The well-established service runs non-stop every ten minutes throughout the day. Full-time security is provided at the free car park.

The adult cash fare is £1.60 return, with under-16s travelling free. No travel or Oyster cards are valid on this special service.

SOUTH WEST

First Devon and Cornwall has doubled the capacity on its X80 service following the success of Plymouth's new Drake Shopping Centre, and earned rare praise from a local councillor, Frances Reeves, who says: "I know full well that people will say I'm not being hard enough on the company, but I feel it is doing its best and has responded well here."

"We are building a good relationship with the bus company in Ivybridge. "They have listened to us and put on bigger buses and more of them. We are really pleased with this response."

First spokesman, Jess Lyons, said that each bus in the X80 fleet will be "significantly bigger".

SOUTH EAST

Roads minister Stephen Ladyman and controversial Kent councillor Keith Ferrin unveiled an upgraded bus route in Sittingbourne last week.

Cllr Ferrin attended a meeting of the **Kent Coach and Bus Operator's group** last week. The 347 Sittingbourne-Kemsley operated by Arriva will run every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday until 20:10. Four buses, each equipped with CCTV and GPS for RTPI, will ply the service, which won £310,000 in Kickstart funding. KCC has given another £150,000 towards running costs and bus stop improvements. **Arriva** has invested £200,000 in the vehicles and marketing.

KCC cabinet member for Highways, Keith Ferrin, said: "As part of our radical Towards 2010 strategy, we are working closely with companies like Arriva to improve bus services, reduce congestion and provide good public transport links."

■ KCC also started testing a radical new electronic traffic control system to tackle congestion in the centre of Maidstone. The council wants to cut congestion by 10% by 2010 - its 'Towards 2010' project. Two giant screens will be linked to a computer-based system which will log traffic, alter traffic light timings and give advance travel information online. Information will be gathered via CCTV, sensors and satellite tracking. Interactive signs which tell drivers which hot spots to avoid will be erected beside Maidstone's main roads when the system becomes fully operational next spring.

Roadworks

■ M6 Cumbria

Current: Roadworks between J37 (A684) and J38 (A685).

■ M56 Cheshire

Current: Roadworks around J7 (A556) and J2 (A560).

■ M60 Greater Manchester

Current: Roadworks between J1 (A5145) and J2 (A560).

■ M55 Lancashire

Current: Roadworks around J3 (A585).

■ M1 Herts/Beds

Until December 31, 2008:

Long-term roadworks and long delays between J8 (A414) and J10 (Luton Airport). Also roadworks and night closures at J13 (A421) until February 26.

■ M25 Greater London

Until December 31:

Roadworks both ways between J25 (A10) and J26 (A121). Also J8 (A217) to J9 (A243).

■ M3 Surrey

Until December 3: Roadworks between J2 (M25) and J3 (A322).

■ M1 Leics / Derbys

Until December 18: Night roadworks Between J20 (A4303) and J21 (M69). Also around J24A (A50) and J28 (A38).

■ M4 Gloucs/Wilts

Until December 22:

Roadworks between J14 (A338) and J18 (A46).

■ M6 West Midlands

Until summer 2007:

Roadworks between J8 (M5) and J9 (A461). Also between J11A (M6 toll) and J13 (A449).

■ M42 West Midlands

Until December 2: Roadworks at J1 (A41), J3 (A435), J4 (A34) and J6 (A45).

■ M5 Devon

Until May 2007: Roadworks and barrier repairs between J29 (A30) and J30 (A376).

■ M271 Hampshire

Until December 4: Night roadworks around J1 (A35).

■ M32 Gloucestershire

Until February 26: Roadworks around J1 (A4174).

■ M876 Kirkliston

Current: Delays at J3 (A876).

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Picture shown for illustration purposes only.

Operator acknowledges maintenance mistakes

A travel company's fleet was reduced after the operator admitted maintenance lapses, although the commissioner acknowledged recent improvements

A travel company's fleet has been reduced after a public enquiry found the owner guilty of poor maintenance and management. Michael Simmons, partner of Westwood Travel, admitted "landing himself in it" over a long list of serious vehicle faults.

Mr Simmons admitted at the Bristol headquarters of the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency that his firm had breached its duties. The problems came to light after a vehicle examiner visited the site in Kingswood, Bristol, in December 2005. The investigation revealed a long list of serious maintenance flaws across the fleet. Westwood Travel operates a fleet of 15 coaches in the Bristol and employs 14 drivers and mechanics. The coaches are mainly used for private hire and told the inquiry he used 13 of his coaches five days a week. But on November 2 Traffic Commissioner Phillip Brown ordered Mr Simmons to cut his fleet to just five for at least 10 days. He said: "I do not want to put you of business but this isn't a good record over a small amount of time. But Mr Simmons if you do not follow Mr Crawley's instructions I will see you here again."

VOSA vehicle examiner Paul Crawley turned up at the site for the unplanned inspection of the fleet on December 15, 2005. Mr Crawley found a series of

problems including:

- poor production of Tachograph charts
- body damage
- shock absorber detached
- faulty exhaust
- PSV exhaust - grease shield missing
- problems with passenger seats

The inquiry heard how Mr Simmons struggled to look after the fleet of ageing coaches and staff failed to do their job properly under his management. Mr Brown said the businessman needed to take more control over the mechanics and driver who had failed to spot problems with the vehicles. He said the systems were in place to ensure problems were minimised but they were not being used effectively.

He said: "Mr Simmons, although the systems are there, it is now a question

KEY POINTS

Vehicle examiner found a long list of serious maintenance faults

Operator struggled to look after his ageing fleet

The Commissioner recommended that Mr Simmons attended his operators' seminar.

of getting it right. Your staff were not fulfilling their job. Drivers were failing to give in maintenance sheets at the end of the day and your mechanics did not spot mechanical problems."

Mr Simmons told the public inquiry that, since the inspection, there had been a maintenance overhaul and he said he had sent one of his mechanics for extra training.

Mr Simmons said: "The three-day VOSA course has been most beneficial for one of the mechanics. The results were most commendable." But Mr Brown advised him to go to the training himself due to his job being "very hands on". He had also put a warning system into place for employees who did not complete their paper work. Mr Brown said: "The operator has improved facilities and systems in the light of the investigation. Mr Simmons said he will follow Mr Crawley's regulations by sending mechanics to seminars and workshops. "I suggest that you go to the operators seminar I am holding in January. It will help." Mr Simmons replied: "I know I've landed myself into a bit of a problem."

Mr Brown ordered Mr Simmons to reduce the number of vehicles he uses to just five for 11 days before January 1, 2007.

TRAFFIC COMMISSIONER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 5, 2006
Traffic Commissioner seminar (North-East)
Ramside Hall Hotel,
Durham, DT1 1TD

February 5, 2007
Traffic Commissioner seminar (West) PSV
Macdonald Hatherley Manor Hotel,
Gloucester, GL2 9QA

February 13, 2007
Traffic Commissioner seminar (South-East)
Ashford International Hotel, Ashford, TN24 8UX

February 27, 2007
Traffic Commissioner seminar (North West)
Macdonald Kilhey Court Hotel, Wigan WN1 2XN

March 7, 2007
Traffic Commissioner seminar (West)
New Holmwood Best Western Hotel, Cowes, Isle of Wight, PO13 8BW

March 13, 2007
Traffic Commissioner seminar (South-East)
North London
Location TBA

To attend one of the above seminars contact VOSA:
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by Alan Payling

No room at the inn

Coach driver information specialist Alan Payling thinks that many operators are not looking after their most valuable assets... the coach driver



You, a typical coach operator have just sent one of your drivers off to Torbay at very short notice on tour for the week. He is up at 4.00am in order to start at 5.00am so he can be in position for his pick ups.

He has a few hours of pick ups, some in unfamiliar locations. He has to deal with the passengers, the luggage and the traffic. He has a deadline to meet to arrive at the hotel in time for the evening meal. He only has a 300 mile drive ahead of him. He is under pressure all day. Due to the traffic he can only take the minimum legal breaks.

En route the hotel rings. "Have you got the order for the evening meal." they demand? This is a hotel that only cooks just enough for each passenger. They expect the driver to take the first evening meal orders for 45 passengers.

Of course, he has all the time in the world to wander round the coach in a very leisurely fashion taking orders doesn't he! Mind you, the choice of meals is not great, chicken or liver, so it only takes 30 minutes. The driver's expletives are deleted at the discovery of this additional burden.

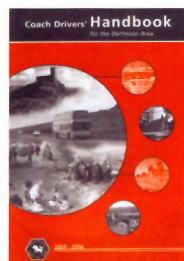
On arrival at the hotel he discovers that there is no one to help with the cases. Having sweated his way through this additional burden, he has to take his coach to the coach park, a couple of miles away. It is now 18.00 hours, only 12 hours after his day started during which he has not experienced anything that could remotely resemble rest or

relaxation.

He returns to the hotel to be allocated his room. Did I say room? He discovers that he is rather low in the hotel's pecking order. After all, he is getting his room for free isn't he? No surprise then that swinging cats will be out of the question this week. There are marks on the wall where the last driver grazed his knuckles having an early morning stretch. Good job he didn't bring many clothes as there isn't a wardrobe. He won't spend much time looking at the view as there is no window. What's that funny smell? By the third day he notices the spots of mould on his shirt hanging on the back of the door. It's only a bit of damp. Not too bad in the summer.

He won't spend much time looking at the view as there is no window

He's doing a Turkey & Tinsel. No need to go to the bar to listen to the entertainment, his room is directly over the ballroom. No need to arrange for an early morning call. The feed from the water tank for all the hotel rooms runs above his head. This is a Victorian hotel. The plumbing is not new. The driver who get a room IN the hotel is lucky.



Alan Payling produces the **Coach Drivers' Information Pack** (www.coachdriversinformationpack.co.uk)

If you want to let off some steam, just tap away at the keyboard and send your rant (or carefully-reasoned views) to cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk, or fax 0845 280 2927. Make 'Open Platform' the subject line. Alternatively, send your missive to: CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Forder Way, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8GX

Last time he came even the broom cupboard was full so he was shunted out to another hotel mile away.

He cuts a very forlorn figure trudging through the dark rainy streets of Torbay with all his bags to find his bed for the night.

A kind Christian soul, feeling that neither man nor beast should be treated in this way during the season of goodwill asks him if he is looking for the Salvation Army. The final straw comes when someone asks him for a copy of the Big Issue.

Do you recognise this poor exhausted chap? Look carefully, he might just be working for a coach company very near to where you are sitting.

So is this how the industry is going to carry on treating a breed of people who are slowly dying out, and no wonder, with treatment like this.

Or, the next time you book a hotel are you going to insist that the driver is not a waiter, and that he is not a pack animal, that he is the most important person on the coach and is therefore to be treated like a VIP and is to receive the very best treatment. You trust him implicitly to look after you most valuable assets, your vehicle and your customers. Surely he can trust you to look after him, can't he?



IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE...

- Face to Face - Go-Ahead's Finance Director Ian Butcher talks to CBW
- East Lincs Coachbuilders' John Horn
- Minibus - All the latest minibus and accessibility news, features and reviews
- PLUS** News, deliveries, products and more



A hard nut to crack

The Eddington Report is imminent and speculation as to what it contains is frenzied. But transport investment looks set to suffer as costs for the 2012 London Olympics spiral upwards. Why do politicians find transport policy so difficult to sort out?

There is growing speculation about the content of the long-awaited Eddington Report, as well as some media frenzy about its likely publication date. A number of dates have been mooted, but as with all government announcements, any number of dates within a given window are possible. But what is clear is that Eddington is imminent.

The trouble is that it may end up being one huge anticlimax: after all, the review team was set up 18 months ago and there has been much speculation about what will be proposed.

Having previously observed that Eddington may prove to be something of a whitewash, it is interesting that recent press speculation continues to suggest that the report will simply endorse the case for congestion charging and rule out the North-South Rail. If this is the crux of the report then it will be truly disappointing. But equally, rumours persist of a major restructuring of the DfT on the back of Eddington, leading to a major change in transport policy. I remain sceptical.

Either way, let's hope that the report does contain some real meat and that Eddington has not been "got at" too much by nervous politicians. For now, let's just wait and see.

For the bus industry, the results of the policy review – still on course to be announced before Christmas – is rather more immediate and relevant and will be arguably the most important policy statement on buses since the Conservatives deregulated the industry. Reports continue to suggest that this will be a neat political package of proposals to make franchising easier, while confining any franchises to relatively discreet and limited parts of the bus network.

The recent meeting between the "big five" operators and the Secretary of State is understood to have been cordial, but is at this stage unlikely to have deflected Douglas Alexander from a course that seems to have been pretty clearly set out in that infamous leaked letter to Jack Straw back in July.

Of course, the imminent announcement on the policy review

will merely spark a further round of consultation leading to a draft Road Transport Bill being published in the spring for, er, a further round of consultation. Now I am all in favour of the democratic process, but one has to ask why it is necessary to drag this out so long. Consultations rarely result in material change in policy and, when it comes to the bus policy review, it's not as if all sides don't fully understand the position of the other. And, of course, after the consultation on the draft Bill we will have a formal Bill introduced to Parliament in November 2007, resulting in yet further debate through to July 2008. The idea that this particular debate will run for another 18 months is a mind-numbing prospect!

Meantime, the escalating costs of the

While Labour struggles with its transport policies, the Tories don't have any answers either

Olympic Games is becoming a growing worry for spending departments. Already there is speculation that the Treasury is considering withdrawing its funding for Crossrail in order to help fund the Games! Mind you, the Treasury has not yet explained how it proposed to fund Crossrail anyway, so no doubt the official line will be that it has not withdrawn funding – on the grounds that you can't withdraw something you have not yet given!

But whatever happens with Crossrail, there must be a wider concern that the departmental spending settlements emerging from next year's Comprehensive Spending Review will be squeezed to pay for the Games.

At the time London was selected to host the 2012 Games, its costs were estimated at around £3 billion. Some estimates now put the final cost at

nearer £10 billion and it's inevitable that the knives will be out to slash other budgets to cover it. Let's hope transport doesn't suffer too badly!

Last Thursday we had the transport day debate on the Queen's Speech. As ever with these set piece debates, they tend to be too politically partisan to offer any meaningful contribution to policy. Chris Grayling, as the Conservative Transport Spokesman, made an effective, if predictable, speech seeking to highlight the failures of current transport policy, pointing also – and quite legitimately – to all the various initiatives that had not actually been delivered on. The abandonment of the Lorry Road User Charge is probably the most obvious and extreme example of a policy failure, alongside the creation and then pretty swift abolition of the Strategic Rail Authority. And he highlighted the tendency for the government to publish a plethora of reports, studies, strategies and plans, yet fail to actually deliver any meaningful projects to address the congestion on our roads and railways, or to reduce the environmental impact of road and air transport.

Chris made a good political point that in 1997 transport policy was under the control of the Deputy Prime Minister, only for it now to be handled by one of the newest and most junior members of the Cabinet.

This is good political knock-about stuff. But the Conservatives will soon need to start to put some flesh on their own transport policies if Chris Grayling is to avoid the criticism of lacking substance. The Conservatives are, of course, in the middle of a major review of transport and other policies, and it would be unreasonable for us to press too hard for an explanation of their policies until the reviews are completed next summer. But parliamentary debates simply serve to remind us that while Labour is struggling with many aspects of its transport policies, the Tories may not have many answers either. Why do politicians find transport such a difficult nut to crack?

The Riddler

Send your letters to cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk, fax 0845 2802927 or write to: Inbox, CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Forder Way, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8GX

Wheel nut discharge

While the magistrates gave Golden Boy Coaches of Hoddesdon the benefit of the doubt when loose wheel nuts were found by a VOSA inspector, the consequences of wheel loss from a commercial vehicle should never be underestimated. As many as 10 deaths occur annually in the UK by what was once referred to as the "lost wheels mystery". The statement contained in the CBW news report made by the defending representative that "experts have carried out extensive research into what causes the loosening of wheel nuts" is true... "but it is a phenomenon that has not yet been explained" certainly is not true. The Society of Operations Engineers has produced an excellent booklet entitled "Wheel Loss - No Longer a Mystery" which every mechanic and fitter responsible for wheel removal and fitting should read and put into practice.

Loose wheel nuts can be traced to poor fitting practices, incorrect torquing or the absence of retorquing following wheel changing. When a wheel is removed from a vehicle for any reason a strict inspection and monitoring process should be undertaken. The common factor when wheel nuts come loose is loss of clamping force of the wheel to the hub spigot. This is caused by "settling" of the components after fitting, or short term stud-creep - both are corrected by the retorquing operation.

The correct torque reading will only indicate the required clamping force if the wheel, and hub mating faces are free of contamination and the nut and stud have been inspected for damage and this damage rectified before re-fitting takes place. Contamination may be in the form of scale, rust, burrs.

All traces of rust, paint, scale, grease and oil should be removed from the wheel nave and hub faces using a wire brush. Any burrs should be ground away. Damaged threads in particular will lead to high friction between nut and stud, leading to a reduction of clamping force generated for an applied torque.

When refitting a wheel the wheel nuts should be "hand-screwed" along the whole length of the stud after lightly oiling (not grease) the threads and the nut to fixed washer (spigot-mounted fixings) interface. The use of an impact air spanner should only be

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Reading your magazine I see that there is still discussion over the forthcoming Drivers' CPC.

I work for a small coach company with 12 drivers including the part-timers and they are all querying the 'reality' of these tests and what it entails, and will they have to do them, as they are all long-serving PSV drivers.

As this company does school bus work, day trips and is rarely away from the depot for long periods, the driving hours are closely watched by the depot manager and owner.

There is a lot of negativity among the drivers. Some say that they hate doing tests and will leave. Some say that as they are nearing retirement they will also leave. The ones past retirement age will also leave. The part-timers say it's not worth it and will also leave. The ones who have families will do it although they don't want to.

Then, who's paying for it? Wages are low in the industry so drivers can't really afford it. Companies have

enough overheads. I read one company will ask drivers to sign a contract, so if they leave they have to pay the costs back to the company.

But I also hear that Stagecoach are owed lots of money by drivers who have left and not paid their costs back.

So who has the answers - please let me know - or am I being too negative?

And me? Well I have always wanted a CPC and never had the time to get one, even though I am an advanced commercial driver and MOTEC-trained.

Twenty-seven years ago I started driving Lodekkas from Chester to Oswestry/Llangollen on the D1/2 service, then 15 years doing tours all over western Europe. Now I'm semi-retired and intend to move to Brittany in 2008, so it's a bit late for me, or is it?

As there is a coach tour company at the end of our road I suppose I'll go and work for them, but will this new CPC be OK in France? And do I need one there?

Still, thanks for publishing a great magazine.

Alan Nicholls

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.



CBW is the only paid-for weekly news magazine for the coach and bus industry. Each week the magazine provides a unique insight. Your views are always welcome. Write to the editor at the above address

considered if it can be set to a much lower value than the final torque and, in any case, a maximum of a half-inch square drive should be used to limit the applied torque. Final tightening of the nuts to the vehicle maker's recommended torque should be carried out using a calibrated torque spanner. Do not over-tighten.

The wheel nuts should be retorqued after 50km or half an hour and again after 24 hours. Finally, a log should be kept of all fleet wheel movements. This calls for a procedure being laid down and close communication between operational traffic staff, workshop staff and drivers when a wheel has to be removed from any fleet vehicle.

A chart should be prepared which shows why where, when and by whom a wheel fitting operation has taken place. The chart should be updated to show that re-torquing has taken place. This is particularly important where a vehicle is away from its base.

The removal of wheel trims, driver education and the daily walk-round checks are vital to monitoring continuously wheel security. It is good practice to write the wheel nut torque on the wheel arch. Regular staff training and an entry in the driver's manual regarding the security of wheels and what to do when away from base is essential.

Colin Rowe, BA IEng MSOE MIRTE MIMI

We take customer service seriously

I write in response to your letter of the week dated November 15 regarding the service afforded to the SENAD Group at a VOSA test station:

VOSA takes customer service very seriously and as the local area manager I made the effort to trace and contact Mr Hiley to discuss the incident. On investigation it transpired that the vehicle was actually presented for test an hour and a half late, not 20 minutes as was previously claimed. Mr Hiley was misinformed of the correct time difference by a third party prior to writing the letter, hence the confusion.

I'd like to take this opportunity to reiterate that customers who arrive late for their allocated test slots can seriously affect the service we offer to those who arrive on time. If customers do arrive late, the station will endeavour to accommodate the test if capacity allows, and as long as the customer is prepared to wait. VOSA is currently reviewing its test programme

in order to provide an improved service, but customers need to be aware that if they arrive late, they may be offered an alternative appointment.

We would advise customers who know they are going to be late to contact their station as early as possible and we will do our very best to accommodate them.

Steven Brougham, Area manager, Greater Manchester and Derbyshire, VOSA

Hours clarification

The anonymous coach operator (CBW November 22) was correctly informed regarding delaying the weekly rest period to the seventh or eighth days. Under the EC 3820/85 regulations, the current legislation on drivers' hours for non-regular national and international journeys, weekly rest may be postponed until the end of the 12th day. Two weekly rest periods must then be taken consecutively.

This rule would apply equally to any

weekly rest period taken after the sixth day, or work period.

The length of the required rest period after working for longer than six days would therefore be 90 hours (2x45). This can be reduced to 72 hours (2x36) at base, with pay back by the end of the third week following that in which the reduction was taken.

This information is in VOSA publication PSV375. However, it should be noted that after April 11 2007, regulation EC 561/2006 will replace regulation 3820/85.

The weekly rest postponement option will not be allowed under these new rules after this date.

The new rules state that in any two consecutive weeks a driver shall take at least two weekly rest periods or one normal weekly rest period (45 hours) and one reduced weekly rest period of at least 24 hours. Compensation will be required as under the current regulation, stated above.

Colin Rowe, BA IEng MSOE MIRTE MIMI

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Meet... Tony Laver

Tony Laver was a driver before the opportunity to buy a coach tour company came along. Pretty quickly, he got rid of the coaches and became Laver Holidays. Mark Williams asked why...

Mark Williams: You don't run coaches but you have two minibuses. What are they for?

Tony Laver: We used to have two Caravelles, but the two W plates we had before had done about 120,000 miles and were just beginning to cost us money to maintain between servicing. We got two Transporters. I wouldn't have anything else but a VW.

I didn't like the Vito at all. These VWs are beautiful machines. The only thing they haven't got is a PA system. That sounds a bit silly on a nine-seater, but we had an American group coming over and the numbers kept dropping until in the end the customer - who by then only had about six passengers - asked what we'd charged for the minibuses. So we cancelled the coach and ran the minibus instead.

I hired the coach driver, and the group loved it. It satisfied one of our inbound customers, saved face and worked very well. But they haven't got mikes in.

I've toyed with the idea of putting them out with small, specialised groups.

MW: What's your current personal transport?

TL: I've got a secondhand Merc but I've done 5,000 miles in it in the last 18 months. I tend to use one of the minibuses to get around, especially if I think I can get anything out of it. After all, they're a mobile advert for Laver Holidays.

MW: How is Laver Holidays changing?

TL: I keep kicking ideas around and then shelving them. Occasionally, we think: "Why not?" and try something out.

There's hundreds of specialist things you could have a go at. The problem is that they can be impractical because it costs too much money to test the water. You can go at it half-hearted, but that's a guarantee that it's not going to work. You have to give it a fair chance and that's the gamble. There's no such thing as half measures these days.

My wife's the moderating influence; I joke that if I'd listened to her on everything we'd never have got anywhere.

MW: Give me an example of innovation

TL: One of our recent expansions is the introduction of singles-only holidays



I've got ten pages promoting Eddie Brown coach tours. I'll work with anyone with high standards

- these days you can never get enough single rooms. Years ago, adjacent single rooms with bathrooms down the corridor were knocked into one for the en suite bathroom.

The demand for singles is growing with our age group - and with women travelling alone a lot more than they used to - but they don't really want to pay extra for them.

So a few years ago, I contacted hotels to find out when they had quiet weeks, then got them to give me a price. But when they offered, for example, 25 rooms at £35 with a £10 single supplement, I'd get back to them and say that I wanted 40 rooms but I'll only pay £3 single supplement.

I've now got singles holidays every

month of the year - hotels came back to me offering midsummer beds for the same price.

MW: Has the blend of your business changed?

TL: We don't run any less coach tourism but we've increased our portfolio by adding air tours and cruises - plus shared departures with other tour operators.

Although the numbers of these other tours aren't significant separated, together they are increasing our numbers. We carry around 7,000 holidaymakers a year.

We use one or two companies for air tours, using their ATOL licence, and the cruises are mostly UK departures for which we don't need ATOL. That means the minibuses are running up and down to Southampton on a quite regular basis with four or five people.

And who wouldn't do it? I just had a call from one of our travel shops for an Amazon cruise - two people at £4,500 each. We'll get our commission for taking those people to the port - you can see the potential is fantastic.

Selling this other business has managed to increase our brochure to 88 pages, and improve our offering. >

Above: Two VW Transporters - Laver's total 'fleet'. Right: Tony Laver

Tony Laver has been in the coach industry since the 1970s, when he was a driver with Barton. He later bought his own coach company, but today he has dumped the coach fleet to concentrate on his thriving holidays business



There's no way
on God's earth
that I want to
sit on the prom
at Eastbourne
and look at the
flowers for a week

Face to Face

We've run our own air tour programme to the Channel Islands for some years now. It's not as big as it was - we used to take 400 people a year to Jersey. So we're not exactly new to air tours.

MW: Isn't it true that, in essence, you've become a travel agent, since all you have to do is list other people's holidays?

TL: Last year in our brochure we had eight pages of Leger Holidays, because I'm an agent for their brochure. It didn't work for us, but we work with Rhine Cruises, Collette Worldwide and other tour companies on a percentage.

On the Rockies tour, we worked with Brewster Tours - a very good company. We feature about 15 or 20 of P&O's cruises, but we can offer any of them, door-to-door.

It all adds enormous credibility to our brochure, but the main business here is running coach tours.

Look at the brochure; I've got ten pages promoting Eddie Brown coach tours. I'll work with anyone with high standards.

MW: The experience of the average air tour is that the customer is on their own from the airport onwards. Doesn't that go against the grain?

TL: You're right - even when it's claimed you'll meet a tour representative you don't get personal attention. But we run a number of escorted tours - my wife Jean and I are escorting a Madeira holiday in April, and it has booked very well. We're also escorting an air tour to Yellowstone Park next June.

MW: Some operators would say that your business is built on the backs of vehicle operators. What would you reply?

TL: I read an operator profile the other day, and the operator said that if he were king for a day, he'd stop people



All smiles: Laver Holidays is a family concern... and a happy family, at that

You can't run holidays in a set of overalls with your ass sticking out from under a coach

who didn't run coaches from running coach tours. And I thought well, they may regard us as leeches if they're not getting work from us.

Coaching is my background and it was my life from the 1970s. The first coach tour I organised was 41 years ago, when I was a Barton driver. So it's not as

if I haven't got some understanding of running coaches.

But I don't have to fill coaches. If I don't get sales, I don't have to hire coaches. If you own them, you have to run them.

The two companies who work for me take £600,000 to £700,000 turnover from me. I have overheads, too, and I have no other source of revenue but tours, whereas they've got private hire as well as tour work.

You can't run holidays in a set of overalls with your ass sticking out from under a coach. I'm not decrying the expertise of running coaches - it's a skilful and complex business - but it's a different thing.

MW: But it's a policy on your part not to run coaches isn't it?

TL: Yes. I can't deny I haven't got the overhead of expensive vehicles. But I let my CPC go and swore to God I wouldn't buy another coach.

The fun in coach tours for me is filling coaches, not running them.

MW: What's the future for the coach tour industry?

TL: I don't think the coach industry is dying, but I don't think it's going to grow a great deal.

It's difficult. The number of senior citizens is growing all the time, but our market share is slowly but surely moving away from coaching.

MW: Is that the industry's fault?

TL: No, I don't think so. It's just the innovation in tourism biting. We're talking about people of my age, and there's no way on God's earth that I want to sit on the prom at Eastbourne and look at the flowers for a week. But 20 years ago I was selling to people who were this age, and they would go down there and walk along the seafront.

To want to do that, you have to be at the point where you can't do anything else.

You could always do anything you wanted to do in your 60s, but people just didn't. Now they feel enabled to do more.

MW: So do you think there's hope for small coach holiday companies?

TL: Yes, of course. It's the loyalty. We were commenting the other day that we hadn't seen Mr and Mrs So-and-So, and a couple of days later, they walked in.

Two hours later, they'd booked a load of holidays - 40 or more seats between them, for friends and family. It's nothing for people to call and say 'We've got four bookings for you but we'll come in at the weekend and sort some more out.'



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Operator Profile

HOLMESWOOD COACHES

Wheeling and dealing



How Holmeswood went from vegetables to coaches is a long story. But what is it now – coach operator or coach dealer? Mark Williams meets the Aspinalls and asks the question

Today is Duncan Aspinall's 44th birthday – a fact he neglected to mention when I proposed a visit to find out more about Holmeswood Coaches.

Not that it's anything more than just another working day for him when, after a drive through glorious Lancashire countryside, I arrive at the yard. Holmeswood Coaches is tucked behind tall hedges on a distinctly rural country lane. For a few minutes, I'd been wondering if my sat nav had let me down.

Duncan welcomes me from a desk which is tidily busy. They are small offices, shoehorning Duncan, his brothers Mark and Colin, administration director Mike Forshaw and a posse of traffic and engineering staff into a space the size of a large sitting room.

"We'll just wait for Dad," says Duncan as the coffee arrives.

"Dad" is Francis Aspinall, the son-in-

law of the founder, Harold Tunks, and husband of his daughter, Margaret.

Francis and Duncan track the company's history – Duncan offering the broad brush strokes and Francis the coachlining of detail about the vehicles Holmeswood has not only owned, but built.

"Oh yes, we've rebodied and re-engined a lot of vehicles," he says. "We did the last re-bodying in 1997." Holmeswood, it turns out, is a company absolutely obsessed with engineering.

And why wouldn't it be? It may have started as a truck business tacked on to a market gardening smallholding, but it not only has Francis holding one side of the steering wheel, but Mark and Colin, who both have engineering degrees, to keep the wheels turning. Duncan, for his part, learned his skills with an honours degree in managerial sciences.

"The degree has been useful," he

says. "The diversity of subject material helped – it covered so many subjects." In the Aspinall directors team, Colin masterminds the money, Mark the engineering and tours, and Mike Forshaw handles much of the office bureaucracy. Duncan is operations director – pulling all the threads together and, no doubt, doing all the jobs nobody else fancies, as is the way of these things.

Definitely a coach operator

Defining the Holmeswood business isn't easy. Not only does it spread its fleet of more than 120 vehicles across five depots, but a sixth depot will double up as a base for, er, BASE.

The relationship between the Holmeswood operating and coach sales businesses is well-known, though few have cottoned on to the umbilical way in which the growing Marcopolo/Beulas/Indcar/Iveco/MAN/VDL/Mercedes

Above: The mixed fleet outside one of three workshops at Holmeswood HQ. Top right (left to right): Mark, Colin, Francis and Duncan. Right: Wheelchair-accessible Cygnus is a signal of intent for Holmeswood



sales part of the operation is linked to Holmeswood.

"Holmeswood Coaches is definitely a coach operator," Duncan insists. If his sales director, Ian Hall, had been there, he would no doubt have been keen to make the point that BASE has a degree of autonomy. But it's the fact neither company is completely independent of the other that gives the Holmeswood group its strength.

Most coach dealerships are just that - the PSV equivalent of your local car franchise, buying, selling and servicing vehicles. Used vehicles stand in the forecourt, new in the showroom. Not at Holmeswood.

If you're interested in any of BASE's used stock, don't bother just turning



up for a look because the chances are very high that the coach you want is out on a school run, on private hire or performing some other duty.

There is very little separation between BASE's stock list and Holmeswood's fleet list; Holmeswood sold more than a quarter of its operational fleet last year because, broadly speaking, if it's not been painted Holmeswood green it's for sale.

The sound thinking behind this strategy is in two parts. As anyone knows, any vehicle left standing in the rain for weeks on end without turning a wheel is, basically, going to rot away. Hot engines, warm air and active bearings have a marvellously preservative effect on steel.

The second point is that depreciation goes on even if not a single kilometre is added to the odometer; modest mileage, on the other hand, has only a minor effect on resale value, and if the dealer can actually achieve income from the used vehicle stock at the same time, he can pass those savings on to the business.

Converting to auto

There are few operators with the engineering know-how of Holmeswood - and its history suggests that's been true for some time.

Francis points out that, among other projects, it has rebuilt a Tiger chassis from scratch, re-engineers body frames, and has no qualms about taking coaches apart. In recent years, the ongoing project has been taking vehicles from manual to auto.

"It's a reliability issue," says Duncan. "Our own fleet is now all automatic."

And by auto, Holmeswood means full auto rather than clutchless manual such as AS-Tronic: "In a sense, AS-Tronic goes against the grain for me," says Francis. "The point of moving to automatic is to avoid vehicle downtime, and AS-Tronic can still be misused."

The Aspinalls are comfortable with the loss of fuel economy with fully auto 'boxes - it uses ZF, Voith and Allison - balancing that against the reduced downtime from not having clutches to replace, and reducing transmission shock which eventually takes its toll on everything in the driveline.

The issue isn't parts and labour cost, it's downtime: "It makes perfect sense if you lose a clutch on a motorway at 1am," says Duncan, who claims just one automatic gearbox breakdown, ever, abroad. "But we must also remember that not all drivers are

Our fleet is now all automatic - it's a reliability issue. We've only had one breakdown abroad - ever

qualified to use manual."

Future-proof seating

Holmeswood up-seats a great many of its vehicles just after they arrive. A flick through the fleet list reveals quite a number of 70-seaters and 57-seaters, because - especially for second-life coaches - that's what councils want operators to run.

On the horizon, Holmeswood also foresees a time when councils will be reducing their special needs bills - a huge per-child transport cost - by getting wheelchairs aboard coaches: "All of our new school coaches are >

Operator Profile

HOLMESWOOD COACHES

coming in prepared for Schedule 1 DDA," says Duncan.

He points out a Marcopolo in the yard with its large, mid-section side door: "The cassette lift isn't fitted in that one, but the structure is there to take one," he says. "Of our own vehicles, five can take wheelchairs and in nine months time that number will be at least ten, maybe 12."

"Retrofitting a wheelchair lift costs at least £15,000. They're cheaper if the coach is built new to take a cassette, and in the vehicle's second life, it's going to need them. It's not just a business decision, there's also the feelgood factor. On one of our school services, an 18-year-old said that it was the first time since she was at primary school she'd been able to travel with her friends. That means a lot to us."

Duncan is very straightforward about when his 70-seaters are put to use: "We never put them out for adult groups," he says, but tells the tale of one operator who put one out for a group of 70 policemen and women. "He told me there wasn't much moving around once they were in!" he says.

Schools experts

There's not much that Holmeswood doesn't know about school contracts - it runs a staggering total of 95 across its six current depots.

Included in that total are everything from a dedicated Cheshire County Council service using brand-new wheelchair-accessible Iveco Viaggio 330s, right down to pretty standard work with 78-seat double-deck buses, from upmarket private school contracts to movements of less orderly secondary school kids.

Cheshire famously pitched straight into the 'yellow buses' market with its own modest fleet of three American-made Bluebirds, to which it then added four Irisbus Scolabuses and a BMC. Holmeswood adds a further two 70-seaters, and feedback for the quality coaches has been very positive, not just during the term but on day trips in the holidays: "So far, the figures stack up," says Duncan.

Not least, says Duncan, because the yellow buses are attracting some quality inquiries for the accessibility. Additional schools-related tour work also adds to the mix.

Holmeswood is having an increasingly reassuring experience with schools. The introduction of CCTV has dramatically reduced poor behaviour and vandalism, while Lancashire County Councils' Safer

Travel Unit merited special praise for working closely with Holmeswood in solving problems.

Schools work - almost half of which is with private schools - makes up no less than 50% of the Holmeswood turnover, and serves the secondary purpose of ensuring stock is started up almost every day without adding significant mileage to vehicles which may get a buyer.

Touring top-up

The acquisition of companies such as Owens, Aspdens, Bostocks and Walkers brought with it some tour work.

Bostocks in particular had always run a fairly significant own-tour programme, and now finds itself part of the Holmeswood range of tours, around 75% of which make the best of the geographical range of the group by being shared departures. The brochure - being printed as I visited - markets the old favourites and a couple of continental destinations.

Though home-spun tours still form 30% of the turnover, Duncan isn't confident of the future of coach touring.

Our customers are literally dying off and there are fewer new people coming along to replace them

"The tour market is changing," he says. "Our customers are literally dying off and there are fewer new people coming along to replace them."

"I think retired people are now far more independent than they used to be. Even so, we have around 75 departures each year, and a further 25 or so tours booked privately by groups."

He reserves special praise for Jane Bostock's expertise in getting the people of Congleton motivated: "I have to say she's really good at selling shows, mostly in Manchester," he says.

What's left of the turnover is provided by a small amount of tour operator in-fill, private hire and corporate work - the latter growing, albeit from a low base. Holmeswood is pretty fussy about who it hires to: "We can be undercut on private hire - with facilities like ours we have a big overhead. But basically

TIMELINE

1947 Business established by Harold Tunks, branching into transport to get produce to market.

1959 Francis Aspinall joins business. Fleet is now five coaches and five trucks.

1985 Duncan Aspinall joins business from University. Fleet is now 12 vehicles.

1989 Buys Nord Anglia International Coachways. Fleet is now 24 vehicles.

1990 Colin Aspinall joins business from London Transport.

1992 Mike Forshaw joins business, following a career as chief engineer in the Merchant Navy.

1994 Buys Owen's of Chorley and Anthony Batchelor Coaches. Fleet rises to 35. A period of organic growth follows, and fleet size rises to 45 vehicles by October 1997.

1997 Buys Bostocks Coaches of Cheshire with depots in Congleton and Macclesfield. Fleet size rises to 80 vehicles.

1998 Mark Aspinall joins business following a career with Volvo Truck & Bus and CASE Corporation.

2000 Buys Walkers Coaches in Northwich. Fleet size rises to 110.

2004 Purchase of Aspdens Coaches in Blackburn.

2005 Current fleet size 130.

2006 New depot opens in Leyland.



if I can't get the price right, I'd rather not send a vehicle out. And we don't do nightclub work."

The fleet is sufficiently varied that Holmeswood will almost always be in a position to match a hirer's needs. Not only does it possess the usual gamut of 49-seat, air-conditioned execs, but there's big demand for its Indcar Wing 22-seaters and Maxim 24-seaters.

The latest acquisitions are two Neoplan Skyliners. Holmeswood has taken the wheelchair-accessible option similar to the Oxford Tube fleet run by Stagecoach but, of course, with MAN engines and Allison World Series automatic gearbox. They are in demand both for private groups and for some tour operators.

There are also a whole range of buses, some of which are run in an "experiment" says Duncan: "We've kept quiet about our three supported bus services, subsidised by Cheshire and Lancashire County Councils."

Two are run with Plaxton Beavers and one with a Dart lowfloor. Duncan admits one - a service run to meet local government objectives - runs virtually empty around a new and upmarket housing estate. I imagine most of the two-car households looking out of their windows wondering if it's lost its way.

"In Burscough, we're swapping the Beaver for an accessible Wing coach which may be more suitable for the estate," says Duncan, anxious that the bus experiment is a success even if the social engineering project isn't.

Forging ahead

What lies ahead? Francis and his son Duncan are both quite certain that the industry's tough times are a long way from over.

"Dealers still haven't worked out the urgency of the situation when a coach breaks down," Francis insists,



Above (left to right): Distinctive green of Holmeswood's coach fleet; Modern facilities allow company to do extensive re-engineering; One of the yellow schools fleet



and Duncan agrees. "These days, the service agents are too interested in truck rental," says Duncan.

"Try to get anything done over the weekend and you get told your vehicle will be ready Tuesday, because the weekend is when all the rental trucks are in for service."

"Rental's starting to find a place in the coach industry. I can see the attraction in having a guaranteed cost per mile and no borrowings on the books."

Francis is convinced that, while vehicle manufacturers may have,

Things like Euro 4 and digital tacho all create glitches in the sales market – peaks and troughs

for example, German think tanks, nobody's consulting UK operators on what they want – and that goes for governments, too.

Then there's the seemingly constant stream of new legislation: "Things like Euro 4 and digital tacho all create glitches in the sales market – peaks and troughs," says Duncan. "As an operator, we feel this too."

Both say digital tachos have good and bad features. The lack of a speed trace is something they say they'll miss. But Holmeswood is certainly up to the challenge – it has six vehicles in digital tacho, for example, and is expecting to have many more in the fleet during the year.

Not that Francis, with his huge experience of driving, is very impressed with the UK application of any tacho regime. He says that in 20 years he's

only ever had a tacho check twice overseas: "Over here, we're turning into a police state," he says, only half in jest.

Some of the checks and balances of government have produced some interesting results. At Holmeswood's rural site, nine feet below sea level, protecting the local watercourses is an Environment Agency obsession. Holmeswood took advice on its surface drainage, and as a result, all run-off heads for a purpose-dug pond full of reeds.

"It's marvellous, really," said Francis. "Once we'd built it, and I could see a film of oil rising up the reeds, I asked the Agency what we had to do next. Nothing, they said, and they're right – it just digests all the yard waste."

So Holmeswood may not be happy about the way things are, but it's prepared for the future. The new depot at Leyland – a 1.3-acre site with an eight-bay workshop – will address most of its engineering needs.

"It was a truck depot for a frozen food firm, so there's three-phase electrics on every pillar where they used to plug the refrigerated trucks in," says Duncan. Leyland will be the focal point for the satellite BASE vehicle sales business but, true to form, Holmeswood will base around a dozen vehicles there so it never loses sight of the bond between sales and operation.

"We've no delusions of grandeur here, for either business," says Duncan. "We could double our turnover overnight by acquisition, but right now we think it's nicely balanced."

The winter shadows are lengthening, and I prepare to leave. I ask if Duncan's having a big birthday celebration. No, he says, maybe just a nice supper with his wife.

If modesty is a virtue, Holmeswood and the Aspinalls are heading in the right direction. ●

THE HOLMESWOOD FLEET

Coach		
Qty	Model	Seats
2006 registered		
1	Iveco Indcar Wing	22
3	MAN Beulas Cygnus Midi	35
1	EuroRider MP Viaggio 2	W 53
2	EuroRider MP Viaggio 2	W 70
1	EuroRider MP Viaggio 2	70
1	EuroRider MP Viaggio 2	W 57
3	MAN Viaggio 2 12.8m	53
1	MAN Viaggio 2 12.8m	55
1	MAN Viaggio 2	49
2005 registered		
2	Iveco Indcar Wing	22
1	MAN Viaggio 2	49
1	MAN Viaggio 2	W 49
1	MAN Viaggio 2	55
3	VDL SB4000 Viaggio 2	57
1	MAN Viaggio 2	37
2004 registered		
5	MAN Viaggio 2	35
3	MAN Viaggio 2	55
1	MAN Viaggio 2	49
1	MAN Viaggio 2	51
1	MAN Viaggio 2	37
1	VDL SB4000 Viaggio 2	55
2003 registered		
1	MAN Viaggio 2	49
1	VDL SB4000 Viaggio 2	49
1	Scania Irizar Century	44
2	Scania Irizar Century	53
2002 registered		
1	Scania Van Hool Alizee	49
2	EuroRider Beulas Stergo'e	49
2001 registered		
1	MAN Viaggio	70
1	MAN Viaggio	49
1	Scania Van Hool Alizee	49
2	MAN Ayats Bravo 1	75
2000 registered		
2	Iveco Indcar Maxim	24
1	Scania Van Hool Alizee	49
1	EuroRider Stergo'e	53
1	EuroRider Stergo'e	49
Pre 2000 registered		
6	Various	69/70
46	Various	53/57
Bus		
3	Midibuses	27-33
19	Double deck	77-80

W = Wheelchair accessible

Fifteen health & safety myths

For many operators health and safety legislation is more than just a tabloid headline. CBW helps explode some of the more major misconceptions.

As health and safety increasingly forms part of the daily headlines with multi-million pound fines being handed out to companies, directors, managers and employees being jailed or heavily fined for health and safety breaches and the new Corporate Manslaughter laws on the horizon, companies still fail to get a real grip on the key issues. CBW explores the top 15 health and safety myths - common assumptions about the law which frequently lead businesses to serious trouble.

MYTH 1 Health and safety need not be a boardroom topic

WRONG. There is a strong belief by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that many companies and organisations do not treat health and safety as a priority and is only dealt with much further down the corporate ladder than at director level. Now, more than ever, companies must prioritise health and safety near to the top three of their corporate agenda.

Time and time again corporate defendants fail to appreciate the huge impact that a regulatory prosecution can have on their business. Reputation can often be irreparably damaged and causes more "pain" than a fine! Employees often suffer significant emotional upset and productivity can be adversely affected over a prolonged period. It is by no means merely a case of financial loss.

MYTH 2 Health and safety is only an issue for the company

WRONG. This is totally incorrect. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, duties and responsibilities are imposed on directors, managers and employees as individuals. Not only does the employer owe a duty to its employees, the employees owe themselves and fellow employees a duty to take reasonable care for their health and safety.

The days of only the company being prosecuted are long gone - in the case of a fatality, the police and the HSE will look at both company and individual(s) in their investigations.

MYTH 3 The board of directors is ultimately responsible for health and safety

WRONG. Though a perfectly correct philosophical statement, actually, unless the directors collectively or individually get involved in day to day health and safety

matters, the buck normally stops with the manager who made the fateful decision.

Interestingly, there have been an increasing number of prosecutions of managers and employees in recent years. Where employees are reckless, stupid or have a total disregard for health and safety, they face firstly being investigated, usually interviewed under caution and then prosecuted.

The recent prosecution of Gillian Beckingham over her part in the Legionnaires disease outbreak in Barrow in Furness is a prime example. Mrs Beckingham was a council design services manager who took the decision to cancel the cleansing of the air conditioning system at the local arts centre which resulted in seven deaths and 172 people being taken seriously ill. In early 2006 Mrs Beckingham was found guilty and was fined £15,000.

MYTH 4 Even if we are prosecuted for health and safety breaches, unless there was a death or serious injury, we would only face a small fine

WRONG. Over recent years, following the high profile health of safety prosecutions of Transco for the Larkhall explosion and the joint prosecution of Balfour Beatty and Network Rail over the Hatfield disaster, fines for the most serious of cases have been in the millions. Fines imposed on smaller companies have also followed the upward trend and this is not limited to cases involving fatalities.

What many companies fail to realise is that the courts are now asking for the company's profit and loss account and basing the financial punishment on those figures. If you are a highly profitable company, you will get stung!

MYTH 5 I don't need a lawyer at an interview

WRONG. Interviews are a regular feature of health and safety investigations. There are three types of interview; voluntary, interviews under caution and Section 20 interviews.

Only under a Section 20 interview can you be compelled to answer questions, you are under no obligation to attend a voluntary interview, and you would only have to attend an interview under caution if you were arrested but you can still choose to say nothing.

The right to have a lawyer present applies to voluntary interviews, interviews

under caution and Section 20 interviews. Investigating officers sometimes say that it is not their 'policy' to allow a lawyer to be present - do not confuse their internal policy with your legal right to have a lawyer present.

Always seek legal advice before attending any type of interview either as an individual or as a representative of the company.

MYTH 6 We have policies and procedures in place to protect us from any prosecution

You may have cabinets full of risk assessments, method statements and health and safety manuals, but when was the last time you reviewed them and compared your working practices against the industry standard?

Health and safety legislation imposes clear duties on you to put your systems in place, implement them and review them on a regular basis. The law requires you to do everything "reasonably practicable" to protect the health, safety and welfare of your employees and those who come into contact with your business. If your documents aren't up to date and your policies and procedures aren't properly implemented and audited, you may have a real problem on your hands if something goes wrong.

MYTH 7 If I train my employees properly, I will be alright

Not entirely right. For sure, by law, you must train your workers to an appropriate standard so that they can carry out their task safely and without harm to themselves or others.

In the UK, however, and unlike other European countries, the HSE expect employers to take into account that their employees may not always follow their training! Adequate supervision and monitoring is therefore required to show that you have taken all reasonable practicable steps to prevent a workplace accident.

MYTH 8 Our Insurers will pick up the bill

If your insurers do offer cover for health and safety prosecutions it is unusual for them to extend this to any proceedings in the Crown Court. Bearing in mind that the maximum fine the Magistrates' Courts can impose is £20,000, most significant health and safety cases end up in the Crown Court.



By law, you must train your workers to an appropriate standard so that they can carry out their task safely and without harm to themselves or others.

Even where you are insured, you may not be covered if your directors or managers are also prosecuted personally. Most companies want to assist their employees by paying their legal costs but this is often outside of the scope of the policy cover.

Crucially, insurers do not pay any fine that may be imposed and increasingly are very unlikely to cover the legal costs of the prosecution. A contested health and safety trial in the Crown Court can cost up to and in excess of £250,000 - how would your company fund this?

MYTH 9 All of our machinery is CE marked, that means it is safe

A CE marked machine is one which has been declared as compliant with the relevant legislation by the manufacturer - but it does not mean it is safe. In practice, it only means that there is a presumption that it is safe.

With all machinery you should undertake risk assessments, obtain the appropriate warranties and ensure that the contractual maintenance is in place and that all employees are properly trained and assessed as competent before they use the machinery.

MYTH 10 It is easier to plead guilty

Don't get us wrong, we acknowledge that many decisions can and should be made on a commercial basis. Unfortunately, nowadays the consequences of accepting that you are guilty of a criminal offence are hugely significant.

Firstly, you will have to deal with the financial penalties and possible imprisonment which may be handed out in sentencing. You must always bear in mind that whilst you may

have pleaded guilty in the Magistrates' Court (where the sentencing powers are limited), your case may well be sent to the Crown Court for sentencing (where the powers are unlimited).

A guilty plea will result in the company getting a criminal conviction. This is recorded and can be referred to in future prosecutions, either in a trial to show that the defendant has committed this type of offence before, or in sentencing to show that the defendant has erred before.

Increasingly, criminal convictions also have to be disclosed in commercial tender documents and as part of a due diligence exercise when a company is sold.

It is inappropriate to decide to plead guilty without taking specialist legal advice first.

MYTH 11 If something serious happens, the company will sell me down the river!

In our experience, they don't, though there are no guarantees. By and large, companies normally seek to protect their directors, managers and employees.

The trick here for the company is to ensure that it has in place directors and officers cover which is relatively cheap so that the individual can be separately represented. This is because solicitors for the company cannot represent the individual - even here, make sure that the lawyer appointed to the individual is a specialist in this area of law.

MYTH 12 If contractors breach health and safety, they only have themselves to blame!

Contractors are notorious for being a law unto themselves when it comes to health and safety! Unfortunately since the mid-1990s,

the law places a large responsibility on the client to ensure that what contractors do on your premises or on your behalf is done safely. How far your responsibility reaches is very dependent on the circumstances including, for instance, in-house expertise, though the larger the company, the greater the responsibility to check, supervise and monitor the contractor. What you cannot do is to ignore them!

MYTH 13 The police and the HSE are here to help us

Not necessarily true. They are also there to establish if there has been a breach of health and safety and, in the case of a fatality, to establish if there is evidence to support a manslaughter charge against the company and an individual.

MYTH 14 The investigating authorities will tell us what happened

Let's get this right from the start - you know your business better than any investigating officer will. Sure, they will have specialist officers to call on but so do you - your own managers and employees!

Unfortunately, in our experience, the client's technical team sits back whilst the investigating authorities do their stuff - don't do it, "kick start" your technical team from day one and get investigating as you will only be told what has happened many, many months from the date of the incident and as and when a decision has been taken by the authorities to prosecute you!

MYTH 15 All our investigation reports and internal statements are "confidential"

Time and time again, the client is caught out by this one. Stamping something "confidential" quite frankly has no basis or meaning in law - it certainly does not protect the client from the HSE using powers under Section 20 of the 1974 Act to compulsorily require documents to be produced including the company's own internal report into the incident.

The "warts 'n' all" internal report into the incident can be protected but only if it is primarily undertaken for a lawyer in order to advise the company on its civil and/or criminal liabilities. Think long and hard before you allow your own health and safety officer to put pen to paper following a serious incident and beware multiple recommendations at the end of the report which will come back to bite!

Paul Burnley is Head of Corporate Defence at international law firm DLA Piper UK LLP and Stuart Ponting is a Corporate Defence lawyer at DLA Piper UK LLP, specialising in regulatory prosecutions.

A turning point for bus priority?

Trent Barton's unceasing campaign to get the sort of priorities enjoyed by Nottingham's trams looks like it's finally getting results. Robin Bennett reports

Trent Barton has tirelessly campaigned for tram-like priorities for its 'tracks' for many years now, but the recently-published third edition of its 'Hot Spots' report, highlighting congestion pinchpoints around its network, the delays they inflict on passengers and possible remedies, has shifted this campaign up a gear. No fewer than 85 locations where road design, traffic signals, inconsiderate parking or sheer weight of traffic affect the smooth running of its network are contained in the illustrated report, which has been widely circulated among local authority officers, councillors, passengers, pressure groups and other key stakeholders.

"These days it is more generally accepted that when road space is in scarce supply, it makes more sense to think about moving the maximum number of people rather than the maximum number of vehicles, especially when so many cars still carry only their driver," runs the introduction to the report.

"Yet still bus routes are regularly obstructed and brought to a standstill. Our track record in growing passenger numbers through quality and investment hopefully speaks for itself - but despite all of that, we are unable to control what we know to be the bus customer's constant number one priority: reliability.

"Some of the Hot Spots in this report require political will and considerable investment to solve. Some are within much easier reach, and for others there may well be an imaginative solution just waiting to be discovered."

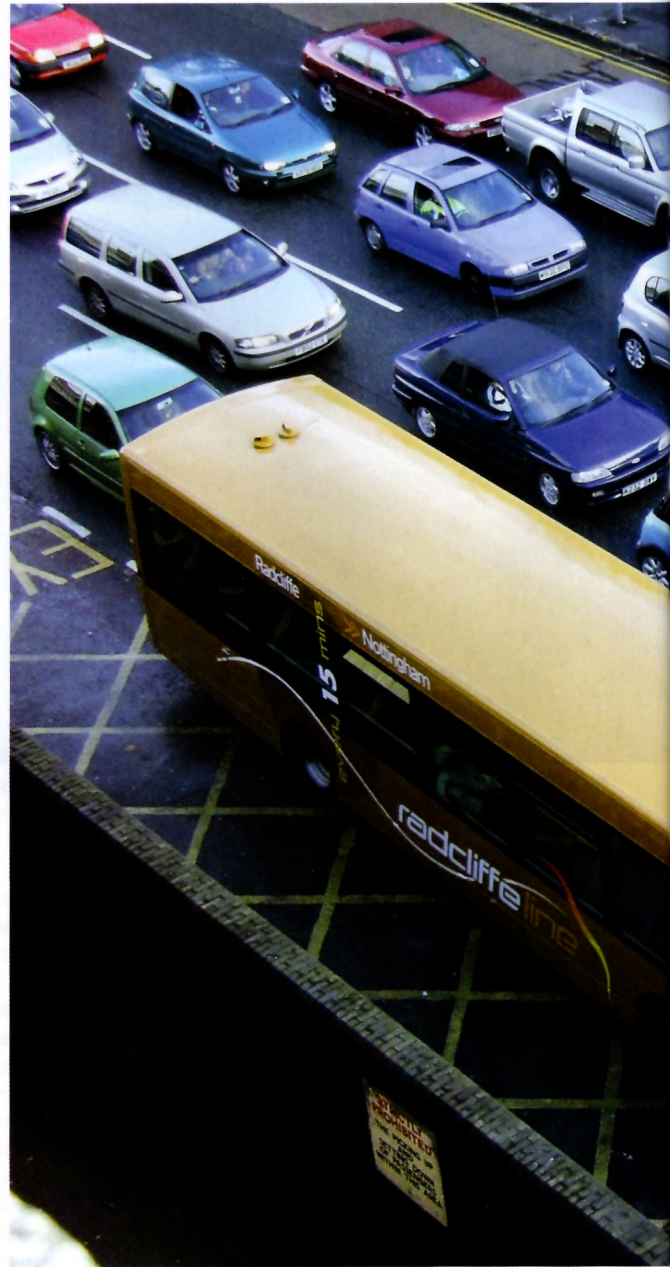
The majority of the problem areas lie within the congested cities of Derby and Nottingham, but outer residential areas bring their own issues. Some examples of the problems identified by Trent Barton include:

■ Nottingham, Broadmarsh Bus Station. "Policing of car park access needs to

be more vigilant. Buses need priority to cross from the bus station exit to Carrington Street and a longer green phase on the traffic signals. Buses have to negotiate 12 sets of traffic signals between Broadmarsh and Canning Circus, and on average nine of them are red when the bus arrives. This delays buses at the start of their journeys and it is difficult to recover the time."

■ Nottingham, Milton Street. "A lack of enforcement of the restricted areas has made the much-vaunted Turning

We are unable to control the bus customer's constant number one priority: reliability





Above: Buses leaving Nottingham's Broadmarsh bus station have to negotiate up to 12 sets of traffic lights. **Left:** Trent Barton hopes improved enforcement will end motorists violating the Turning Point zone

Point scheme a complete disaster for bus users. The quality of all bus services in terms of timekeeping has deteriorated sharply since the scheme that was designed to assist buses was introduced. Bus customers voice their complaints daily to bus drivers and the bus companies and many have reached the end of their tether. The fastest route out of the city centre is the car route and unless the city council takes action to solve this problem as a matter

of extreme urgency, passengers will be lost to the public transport network."

■ **Toton, Corner.** "The traffic lights should give priority to all inbound traffic in the morning peak and specific priority to buses. Delays to Rainbow 5 and Long Eaton Xprss amount to ten minutes or more and are getting worse."

■ **Derby, Five Lamps Junction.** "The proposed bus lanes agreed in the Bus Quality Partnership Agreement between Allestree and Five Lamps must be delivered before December 31, as agreed. If significant time savings can be achieved it will be possible to increase the frequency of the Allestree brand at no additional resource cost."

■ **Ripley, Grosvenor Road.** "On-street parking reduces the capacity of the street and delays bus services. Car parking should be confined to car parks to leave the roads free to accommodate moving traffic. The removal of parking

bays would create extra road space for bus priority measures. The phasing of traffic signals at the High Street junction hinders buses and bus actuation would assist. Customers suffer delays of two minutes on most days but up to five minutes on market days."

One of the key problems facing the highly-regarded operator is that higher frequencies are not the answer. Providing more buses through congested streets will simply lead to more bunching, it points out, which will irritate passengers even more and escalate costs and force fares up, also not a popular solution for its users. Simply adding more journey and layover time is also costly and reduces the competitiveness of the bus compared to the car.

"We have reached the point at which higher frequencies would be counter-productive," says Melvyn Hopwood, Trent Barton's head of communications. "People's perceptions of our service would suffer if two or three buses came along routinely at once, even though we'd be doing right by the market." The key now, says Hopwood, is to shave off

On every road in every area there is inevitably the same problem of getting buses through

The fastest route out of the city centre is the car route. Passengers will be lost to public transport

even a few seconds from journey times wherever and whenever possible.

The annual Hot Spots report received a good, and rapid, response from the four main local authorities within Trent Barton's operating area - Derby and Nottingham city councils and Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire county councils. Nottinghamshire has already committed to improvements at the Toton Corner junction, as well as in Chilwell, during this financial year, with promises of more to follow.

Hopwood says the value of the report is in drawing attention to specific problems, and possible solutions. "On every road in every local authority area there is inevitably the same problem of getting buses through," he says. "Within this great sea of random events, we give it some focus and give local authorities the benefit of our experience." This is helped, he maintains, by the fact that the business is broken down into >

small dedicated teams for each route – drivers, team leaders and brand managers who experience the problems and can gather evidence. “We’re not saying this is the best way to solve the problem, we’re not highway managers, but we’re suggesting it could be something like this,” says Hopwood. “That leads to the local authority saying: ‘OK, there’s a problem, is there a better way of solving it?’ It acts as a catalyst.

“We could just bury our heads in our hands. We could hear that a route with a six-minute frequency has delays of 50 minutes, so that’s eight buses running together, and shrug our shoulders and say it’s impossible. But instead of

The world changed when the tram came in. It won’t be delayed by a skip left in the road

waiting for the world to come to us, or grind to a halt, we’re telling people where the problems are.”

Although the emphasis is on quick-win, easy enhancements first, Hopwood points out that the total priority given to Nottingham’s tram shows that very difficult decisions can be made to work. “The world changed when the tram came in. This will not be delayed by a skip in the road, by someone parking two wheels up on the pavement, by someone stopping in front of it to drop off a relative, or by a gang getting out of an unmarked van to dig up the road and forcing it to go round the backstreets. There is now a culture established,



Caught in the act! We photographed three cars in two minutes entering the Turning Point bus-only zone last week. But would these same drivers risk straying onto tram lines?

drivers continues (though perhaps not at the levels once seen when Trent Barton managed to capture on film a traffic police car sitting happily in a queue of motorists that shouldn’t have been there), Hopwood says it is important to be supportive.

“There are more things to do, and the city council has listened to our criticisms,” he says. “It’s a well-designed scheme on a road that has been a through-traffic route down the ages, so breaking that habit overnight isn’t going to be easy.”

Hopwood points out that motorists are still “driving with impunity” through the zone, although he believes that some of this is down to sat nav systems telling people to do so, while cars legitimately accessing a hotel in the zone leads to “open season” for other motorists to follow suit. A redevelopment of a Primark store in the zone, meanwhile, saw disruption to buses from illegally-parked articulated lorries – the drivers said that it was cheaper for them to pay a parking fine than to risk penalties from missing their delivery slots.

“Rigorous enforcement has been the piece of the jigsaw that has been most conspicuously missing,” says Hopwood, although he has high hopes that pending decriminalisation of such offences in Nottingham will help, as has improved signage and remodeling of taxi laybys. “We certainly don’t want to move the buses any further away from the city centre shops, as this will lessen even more our advantage over the car.”

But as with all of the identified Hot Spots, Trent Barton has found that with Turning Point, persevering has been worthwhile. “We keep putting our input and discussion into it, and keep having regular meetings to go through the very fine detail,” says Hopwood. “Only then will we get to the next stage.”



of a public transport system with absolute priority.

“We now want them to do the same for our tracks too,” says Hopwood. “The lessons learned from the tram can now be applied to buses effectively and so much more cheaply. It’s kicked the argument into another gear.”

Also, at last, moving into another gear is the “much-vaunted Turning Point scheme” referred to in the report which began life in July 2005 with the conversion of a major through-route in Nottingham city centre to buses only, plus licenced cabs and bona fide delivery drivers. Although violation by motorists and undisciplined delivery

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Show Report

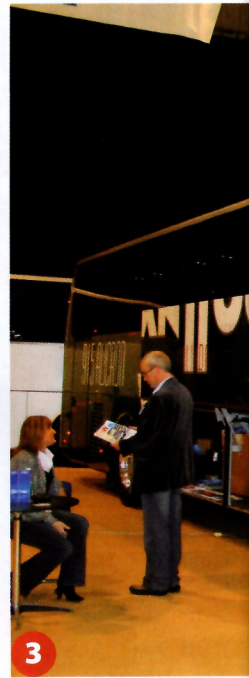
DUBLIN COACH & BUS 2006



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6

1: Turkish-built BMC school bus proved a winner with Irish operators.
2: Elegant seating in the new Mercedes-Benz Tourismo.
3: Cronin's Val Hool T915 Alicron – available to meet Euro 5.
5: Noone's 12.7m Beulas Cygnus on a MAN R33 chassis.
6: Barton displayed this Plaxton Paragon on an Irisbus Eurorider chassis

Dublin delights

Martin Cole reports from the 2006 Coach & Bus Show at Simmonscourt Pavillion in the Irish capital

A buoyant Irish economy helped in no small way to make the 2006 Coach & Bus Show a real success.

The event was held, for the first time, over a Friday and Saturday instead of the traditional Saturday/Sunday, for organisational reasons, and despite Friday being a little slow – largely due to work commitments – the visitors came en masse for the final day and, according to verbal reports, a great deal of business was either done or is pending.

The two largest displays of vehicles in the Simmonscourt Pavillion were supplied by Brian Noone and Esker Bus & Coach. Esker had at least 17 examples of coachbuilt and converted minicoaches plus two full-sized Hispano Divo VDL

SB4000s. One of them, a 12.7m example with 57 seats, had been sold to Stewarts at the NEC two weeks previously and is the first one sold in the UK market. Esker already has nine on the road in Ireland.

Managing director, Danny Magee, said: "We are absolutely delighted by how well the sales of the Hispano have begun. We feel it is a very attractive package and we've worked closely with the company to achieve a good-looking and distinctive coach which is also practical and affordable.

"From early next year the Divo will be available with a revised entrance area and dash. The fridge will be integrated into the dash panel to create more space and the styling and finish of the dash is

much more attractive."

Noone's huge range of vehicles was swollen this year through the appearance of two Optare Solos – including the Euro 4 MAN-powered demonstrator – emphasising the company's allegiance with Optare as its official distributor for Ireland.

Coaches on view included the 12.72m Beulas Cygnus on a MAN R33 chassis and 12m Beulas Aura on the Irisbus Eurorider C43 chassis. The latter stands 3.85m high and was equipped with 51 seats and a centre sunken toilet.

The company is also a dealer for Indcar and markets the Mago 2 (Maxim 2 in the UK) on MAN's 10.220 chassis with a range of specifications with seating capacity for up to 35. It also markets



the smaller Wing body, also available in the UK, but this can be supplied on the Mercedes Vario O815D in addition to the Irisbus Iveco 65C17.

According to director Mark Noone, quite a lot of interest was also shown in the Mercedes-Benz Atego-based Beulas Stela. With capacity for up to 30 seats and considerable luggage space it could prove to be a popular option.

As the Irish bus market begins to move more towards a deregulated regime much more interest is being shown in full-sized buses, particularly double-deckers, and in school buses. East Lancs had a larger than usual presence and took a lot of enquiries across the whole range of products. They included the single-deck Kinetec and double-deck Kinetec Plus, The Esteem and Scania Omni Dekka - of which an example recently supplied to Malahide Coaches was on show. Sales director John Horn said interest in the MAN-based Kinetec Plus had been surprisingly good. Although the model shown had been built to European specification, measuring 4.0m high,

a full-height model was currently in production and would be finished to London spec where it will enter service with an, as yet, unspecified customer.

Alexander Dennis took along an Enviro400 double-decker and gained a similar response. ADL field service manager, Nigel Parks, said he was delighted by the response and was confident a number of sales would result from enquires made over the weekend. The company had also been questioned about its Enviro300 for school bus operation. This is one of the current options being trialled by Bus Éireann which is going to lead to substantial orders for around 400 vehicles over two years as the whole school transport system is modernised.

EvoBus UK managing director, Oliver Moeckesch, said he had been delighted by the response to the new Mercedes-Benz Tourismo and equally thrilled at how the EvoBus business had blossomed in general. Tourismo, he said, had already taken orders in the UK and Ireland and he was looking forward to deliveries starting in the first quarter

of next year. He was also on a high over Setra's performance, saying: "Last year was a record for us with 75 Setra coaches sold. This year we are looking at 90 and I expect we can even top that in 2008 when we celebrate 25 years of Setra in the UK. DaimlerChrysler has finally begun to recognise the importance of the UK and Irish markets and is gearing up accordingly."

The display also included a Citaro citybus, a Setra S415HD featuring the 'glass roof' and just 32 leather seats in a two-plus-one configuration, and an S416 GT-HD.

Volvo marketing manager, Adrian Wickens, confirmed a successful show for the company with high levels of interest, particularly in its coaches. He said with demand for the stunning B12B Jonckheere JSV running very high, all the early production had been snapped up and build slots at Roselare would not be available until towards the end of the first quarter in 2007.

Joining the JSV on the stand was a B7RLE with Wrightbus Eclipse bodywork in special 60th anniversary colours. >

7: Esker's Atego-based Cimo is a stylish and proven top seller.

8: Value for money – the BMC Karisma is a cost-effective Euro 4 midicoach

9: Marcopolo Viaggio 350 is recognised as a practical workhorse

Show Report

DUBLIN COACH & BUS 2006



1: Scania Irizar PB triaxle set to join the Wharton's coaches fleet.
2: Setra's S416 GT-HD sales at an all-time high.
3: Temsa's new 12.2m Safari HD.
4: Optare's Solo is now available through Brian Noone, the official distributor for Ireland

OHM, the official dealer for BMC and Autosan in Ireland, claimed to have had a very busy show. Paul Nicholson, sales director of Auto Holdings, said the €145,000 price tag on the new Euro 4 Karisma had made it a very popular choice in the midicoach sector. The BMC school buses were also sought after and he expected all the remaining stock of ten Euro 3 vehicles would be sold before the event concluded. Demand had been high across the range and virtually all the company's pre-ordered production had been sold.

He said although considerable interest was being shown towards the non-showing KingLong models, there would be new product available shortly. "There have been some difficulties in getting the supply line sorted out," he said. "We have effectively bought out the middle man and can now deal direct with China.

"It will be easier to get the vehicles built to our own specifications and the pricing will be much more competitive. The first of the revised 6127 coaches has already been sold. It will be

brought in as a 55-seater powered by a Cummins ISBe6 (the original ISM will not be available in Euro 4 for at least 18 months) and with a ZF driveline."

Westward Scania showed two Irizar PBs, one for Whartons and the other for Enfield Coaches, alongside the ever-popular Century.

Plaxton were ably represented by Bartons, with a Paragon and a Cheetah in the dealer's own operating livery.

VDL Bus drew considerable attention with a display that included the new 12.2m Temsa Safari HD and its smaller sibling, the Opalin midicoach. A Berkhof Axial 50 and a Marcopolo Viaggio completed the line-up.

Van Hool gained strong presence from a display by Dermot Cronin that included the T9 Alicron 911 with 37/41 reclining seats and a brace of larger T915 Alicrons in Euro 5 ultra-low-emission form. One of these was the Eavesway model, with forward access for wheelchairs. This vehicle was due to return to the factory immediately after the show for a number of modifications which will make it more practical in

day-to-day operation.

The Van Hool marque was also represented by Moseley in the South with a T9 Acron triaxle equipped with 57 seats and based on a Volvo B12T chassis with I-Shift transmission. Moseley also showed its stalwart Bova and a 29-seat version of the Beluga 2 minicoach.

Cora Collins, chief executive of the CTTC - the show's organising body - said: "We feel it's been a very successful show, and we'd like to thank the exhibitors for their support. The revenue from this show helps to fund the CTTC in its campaigns to bring about regulatory change, which will benefit independent operators and create an even bigger market for our exhibitors in the longer term.

"We're delighted to see such a good attendance and to be able to put the very best in technology on show here to demonstrate how much the sector is capable of. We're getting a lot of calls to make this a three-day event next time round, and we will certainly look at our options." ●



Low weight, high comfort and low production costs characterise the new high-strength steel bus seats from the Canadian company Multina. The Ultra Light seat has now been nominated for the Swedish Steel Prize 2006, awarded for design excellence

STRONG BUT LIGHTWEIGHT SEATS

CBW
PRODUCT
OF THE
WEEK

Multina's new Ultra Light seat has been in use for more than 18 months in express buses running between the Canadian cities of Quebec and Montreal. The buses are subjected to high traffic density and loading, which demonstrates that the nominated design has undergone serious field tests and has emerged with flying colours.

"These buses are in service for most hours of the day and night, and carry many passengers," explains Éric Belval, development engineer and project leader at Multina Inc, of Drummondville, Canada. "No material problems have been reported to us. This demonstrates that advanced high-strength steels produce a very durable structure, even though we have used much thinner material than in the past."

The new seat makes a comfortable and luxurious impression, with thick cushions upholstered with leather. Folding armrests are mounted in sturdy brackets and the seat has a higher backrest than other comparable seats. But in spite of this, the seat is about up to 10 kilos lighter, which is important in restricting the

total weight of the bus. The designers have also reduced the seat weight by specifying holes in various profiles in order to remove unnecessary material. The work of upholstering the seat also benefits by the backrest frame consisting of only one continuous steel profile. Instead of a compression-moulded plastic panel, the steel profile at the rear of the backrest is covered with a thin layer of plastic foam and then the same upholstery as the remainder of the seat. This results in a more attractive design, and the new Multina bus seat stands well out from its rivals.

The project has enabled Multina to build up valuable new knowledge that the company is keen to develop further. Éric Belval considers that a further 5kg can be cut from the weight of the seat, which is now only just over 30kg.

With Interest in efficient transport growing in the market, and with buses and trains becoming more interesting alternatives to car and air travel, Éric Belval is convinced that the demand will continue to grow and that Multina has every opportunity of becoming a major supplier of bus and train seats, as well as entire interiors.

■ Multina can be contacted on +1 819 785292. Ask for Éric Belval.

PNEU-LOGIC FIRST WITH WIRELESS PAPERLESS FLEET DATA RECORDING

Pneu-Logic claims to be the first to the market with a completely wireless and paperless tyre data recording system.

Pneu-Inspector, developed by Pneu-Logic, has gone into partnership with Goodyear Dunlop to market and promote the system.

It is a hand-held, easy-to-use, tyre tread depth combined pressure gauge which collects accurate tyre data and uses



Bluetooth technology to communicate with the hand-held mobile computer.

The result is real-time information, allowing fleet managers to view data about their tyres within seconds of them being inspected. Its simplicity and effectiveness was enough to convince Goodyear to team up with Pneu-Logic.

Ian Sedge, Goodyear's field operations manager, says: "Pneu-Inspector combines speed, accuracy and ever greater reporting efficiency for our fleet customers – it's just another way that Goodyear Dunlop can demonstrate both the completeness of its package and its real competitive advantage."

Until now, inspectors would use a digital

pressure gauge, a tread depth gauge and digital calliper to compile tyre data that would be recorded on paper forms.

But every aspect of Pneu-Inspector is electronic, so inspection time is halved. Error-free data is immediately available via Bluetooth technology on the hand-held PDA and can be sent direct to a fleet manager's computer, printer or other management system.

The Pneu-Inspector is simple to integrate into existing business and software systems and can be used worldwide.

Pneu-Logic believes that Pneu-Inspector will give fleet managers improved business efficiency and an extra-competitive edge that comes from having information instantly.

Laren Yeomans, Pneu-Logic's MD, says: "Goodyear Dunlop has quickly become the industry leader in tyre data collection for fleet inspections. This shows the commitment Goodyear Dunlop is making to its Fleet customers to deliver a best-in-class service."

"The probe's patented design is the culmination of many years of design and development by our team at Pneu-Logic, and the probe has now set the standards for electronic data collection within the tyre industry. Further product enhancements are planned throughout 2007, which will add a UHF handheld tag reader to the existing RFID system and 'Fast Check', a Pneu-Logic solution that will decrease vehicle inspection and reporting times by up to 75%".

■ Pneu-Logic is based at Unit B, Rembrandt Business Centre, Robian Way, Swadlincote, Derbyshire, DE11 9DH. Tel: 01283-223232. Website: www.pneulogic.co.uk.



BEST SHOW YET FOR DRINKMASTER

The sales team at Drinkmaster heralded the recent Euro Bus show as being the best ever for increasing business.

Sales manager Kevin Almond was delighted to report that over 30 new accounts were opened at the show, and that he and his sales team are busy following up just over 100 qualified sales enquiries.

Kevin says: "It just goes to show that in these days of email-this and web-the-other, getting people all together under one roof and being face to face is still by far and away the best way of getting business done."

"We've already booked our stand for next year – we knew by the end of the first day that the show was worthwhile for us – in terms of reaching new customers as well as having the chance to catch up with drivers who are usually on the road and in touch by phone."

The Drinkmaster team was showing the wide range of drinks they offer for on-board services and also for driver's rooms. They were kept busy throughout the show making drinks for people to try – Nescafé Cappuccino is the fastest growing drink in Drinkmaster's range of over 40 drinks and it was a real hit on the stand. There was also a great deal of interest in the new Exceliso machine – designed to put up with heavy use in driver's rooms while still being affordable.

The Exceliso is available to rent for just £6.99 a week or can be bought for £960 with 200 trays of drinks.

■ For information, contact Jo Shinner on 01579 342082.

TIME TO TIGHTEN YOUR BELT

A new belt tightener from Agriemach is a simple but clever tool, turning a two-man job into a quick, one-man practice.

The tightener will work on most alternators and other belt-driven units as the curve of the tool hooks itself around the part so you can easily lock the position of the unit to suit your needs. This tool is a must for busy workshops.

■ The tool can be ordered from Agriemach by phoning 01342 713743 and costs £10.20 (inc VAT).

There's more than just passing a test

Pride's Steve Morison looks at the benefits of driver quality and service monitoring as an integral part of operators' training regimes

Driver training and development initiatives can transform an operator's reputation by providing the extra skills drivers need to fulfill their roles as modern bus drivers. Quality training not only increases safety and customer care but leads to higher job satisfaction, which shows up in better company performance.

Valuable training includes situational training, providing drivers with the skill sets that allow them to make timely, knowledgeable decisions that benefit both the customer and the company. Most operators appreciate that there is more to driving a bus than just passing the PCV Driving Test. Many go on further by providing both initial and professional continuous training to develop drivers' skills. A few major operators use independent specialised companies to benchmark their overall performance. These specialists have teams of professional assessors that are not only qualified driving assessors but also have personal experience at delivering a bus service. They understand the operator's ticketing machines, passes, procedures and policies.

For any training needs analysis and quality assurance systems to be truly accurate and effective they do need to be independent.

The assessments also need to be conducted by professionally trained and qualified assessors to consistent, robust, uniform standards. Until recently there

were only two quality assurance systems available - mystery traveller surveys that were generally assessments of the quality of service undertaken by semi-trained assessors and driver quality monitoring that focused on driving ability.

Now there are a few companies that have combined the two aspects of these quality assurance systems. Driver quality and service monitoring can be cost-neutral when it is part of a proactive training cycle by reducing accidents and customer complaints, focusing training and improving company image.

Generally, driver and service monitoring entails a 20 to 30-minute covert assessment which is assessed against a set criteria. Driving ability topic headings are graded using the industry standard four grade system:

- Grade 1 = No fault worthy of recording
- Grade 2 = Only low-risk driving faults
- Grade 3 = High-risk driving fault(s)
- Grade 4 = Actual dangerous driving.

As well as providing a detailed marking sheet, the reports highlight the overall grade for driving ability. Customer care skills and service standards are graded using a similar box marking system, starting with Grade One = Excellent, down to Grade Four = Unacceptable. The reports also include a balanced commentary which enables the staff manager to effectively debrief the driver.

Sophisticated computerised monitoring systems allows for analysis at different levels, driver, route, depot, operating company and so on. Managers can also see who has been assessed, who hasn't and track any follow-up action.

By supplying operators with the facility of logging onto a secure internet-based database, managers are able to view assessment reports within hours of the assessment being completed. This speed of service allows managers to praise, encourage and give constructive feedback while events are still clear in the driver's memory. Drivers appreciate the independent feedback. For some this may well be the first time they have been told, not only that they are doing a good job, but what specifically they do well. Encouragement and praise are extremely powerful tools in developing driver skills.

The computerised system not only allows operators to quickly identify driver's individual training needs and service shortcomings but giving them the opportunity to monitor even small changes in quality across the whole of the operation. Operators can quickly see the results of any training initiative, and when profit margins are tight, focus training were it is most needed.

As the driver's CPC requirement draws closer don't forget to visit www.drivers-cpc.co.uk for up-to-date information, as well as reading your weekly copy of CBW.

For some this may well be the first time they have been told not only that they are doing a good job but what specifically they do well

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Vehicle electrical problems? Well don't shoot the messenger

Invalid warranty claims for returned multiplexed Input/Output units highlight the need for better training in the use of electronics diagnostics tools.

Today's buses and coaches are complex vehicles incorporating a range of auxiliary systems to improve passenger comfort, safety and security. Most of this equipment is now controlled electronically. This growth in the number of black boxes has brought about a major shift in culture in the service bays. Laptop computers and electronics diagnostic tools are now commonplace alongside grease guns and torque wrenches.

The role of the vehicle electrician has changed dramatically. Wiring looms linking components are being replaced by multiplex communications, using a single wire to transmit commands between a central management unit and IOUs (input/output units). With IOUs located strategically around the vehicle, multiplexing reduces wiring and precludes the need for dedicated fuses and relays. Wherever possible, moving part components have also been replaced by solid state equivalents, most of which are virtually indestructible.

But as the number of peripheral electronics, switches and sensors has increased, so has the need for a more sophisticated means of tracing faults. Responding to this challenge, leading multiplex specialists, such as Actia, have developed more sophisticated computer-based diagnostics tools.

Despite the availability of these tools, however, too many technicians are still going after the electronics – simply swapping out IOUs on a hit and miss basis, which invariably misses. Warranty statistics provide the proof. According to Paul Kay, managing director of Actia (UK) Ltd, more than 50% of IOUs returned, are in fact serviceable.

"The need for better training is evident because so many problems are being wrongly labelled as IOU faults, when in fact they stem from incorrect diagnosis or poor understanding. The net result is further delay and cost while the fault is traced and rectified. This all adds up to lost revenue and unnecessary costs incurred in spares and administration."

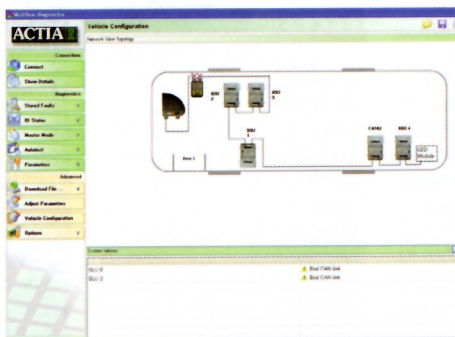
"It seems that some technicians presume that diagnostics are intended to check the multiplexed components rather than the real purpose, which is to help them check methodically the integrity of the electrical system, or trace the fault to a particular component or connector that has malfunctioned."

Good technicians follow a fixed sequence of diagnosis. They understand the multiplex system they are working on, how parts inter-connect, how the system operates, what its limits are, and what to expect when things go wrong. Most faults are caused by simple things and they usually occur in a fairly predictable pattern. Electrical problems, for instance, usually occur at connections rather than within components.

Paul Kay concludes: "Investing in good training and the right diagnostic equipment pays back dividends in several ways. Most important, it will eliminate the unnecessary practice of swapping-out good equipment on a trial-and-error basis. This alone will achieve significant savings in



Getting to the heart of an electrical problem with Actia diagnostics (above), with the result clearly shown on the monitor (below)



administrative workload.

"Ultimately good practice will reduce the time taken to find a fault and repair it. As well as savings on workshop man-hours, this minimises downtime and gets the vehicle back out on the road, earning revenue instead of taking up valuable garage space."

Actia (UK) Ltd (www.actia.co.uk) is a leading supplier of multiplex electrical systems and diagnostic tools for use on bus and coach applications. Vehicles fitted include Alexander Dennis, Optare and Plaxton models. In addition to the Multibus and Aladin diagnostics tool for vehicles from these manufacturers, Actia can also incorporate diagnostic software from Allison, Cummins, Voith and Deans' doors communicating via a single vehicle interface to create a multi-system, multi-make diagnostic tool.

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk or write to the address on page 3

OXFORD CITY SIGHTSEEING

City Sightseeing Oxford has recently taken delivery of another brand-new semi-open top tour bus – a Volvo B7R bodied by East Lancs Coachbuilders. The latest addition to the fleet has a Euro 3 engine fitted with a particulate trap system.

Oxford City Sightseeing bought a similar vehicle last year and was very pleased with it, as manager Paul Tapin explains: "It's excellent. Last year's proved to be a great vehicle, so we went for the same again. Both drivers and passengers have passed on very positive comments. The part-closed roof is a great feature which we need in this sort of weather!"

The bus has 84 seats with

a multilingual commentary system offering eight languages as well as a live guide for every passenger. The Volvo 7-litre engine is coupled to a ZF automatic gearbox, which the drivers have been greatly impressed with so far.

City Sightseeing runs between six and eight tours a day in winter along a six-mile route, with significantly more trips in the summer months.

Operator rating: 10/10 "It's very rare you can give any vehicle full marks, but this one ticks all the boxes."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B7R/
East Lancs Viking
Engine Volvo 7-litre
Transmission ZF auto
Seats 84
Spec Multilingual
commentary
Supplied by East Lancs
Coachbuilders 01254 504150



TRAVELGREEN COACHES

Doncaster operator Travelgreen Coaches' latest fleet addition is yet another Optare Soroco 16-seat minicoach. It is the fifth the company has bought since 1999.

Owner Dave Green, who has been running the business with his wife Janice since 1978, says it's not just the quality of the product but the all-round package that Optare offers that keeps them coming back.

"Soroco is the ultimate in 16-seat minicoaches. It's a very well-finished and stylish coachbuilt-body on a proven and reliable Mercedes-Benz chassis. They know what standard I want and they deliver."

"For the sort of quality corporate and private hire work that we do the Soroco is ideal. Luggage capacity is good and we've even found it suitable for mini tours."

The new Soroco has been specified to a very high standard, with Fainsa high-back coach seats of which 12 are recliners. All seats have leather inserts and edge



padding, grab handles and gangway armrests and are fitted with a lap and diagonal seatbelt to full M2 standard.

Carpeting throughout, full-draw curtains, air conditioning and a powerful Webasto heater ensure a comfortable environment within the saloon.

Dave Green says: "I particularly like the stylish looks of the Soroco – the finish is as good as a luxury car. All of this contributes to a good residual value when I move it on in three years time and this helps to make the whole-life vehicle cost much more attractive for such a quality product."

The Soroco NT is based on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter Cdi chassis and is powered

by the four-cylinder 2.15 litre Mercedes-Benz OM611 engine, which delivers 129 bhp. The engine is matched to a five-speed synchromesh gearbox with overdrive. ABS and ASR are standard.

Operator rating: 8/10 "So far it is everything I expected it to be – absolutely bang on."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Mercedes
Sprinter/Optare Soroco
Engine Mercedes-Benz OM611
Transmission Five speed
synchromesh
Seats 38
Spec Full-draw curtains,
air con
Supplied by Optare 0870
0330005

STAGECOACH

The Stagecoach Group has just taken delivery of 31 brand-new Volvo B7Rs to be deployed on a variety of routes around the UK.

The Plaxton Profile-bodied coaches all feature Volvo's D7C 275hp engine, with each coupled to a six-speed ZF gearbox.

The 49-seaters are all fully wheelchair-accessible.

Two vehicles are on the Bluebird Aberdeen

to Inverness service 10 – making that service entirely wheelchair-accessible – while nine have been introduced on the Bluebird 25/25X service running from Inverness to Tain.

Fourteen vehicles are operating on the Stagecoach Express St Andrews to Glasgow X24/6 service, making it virtually a completely wheelchair-accessible operation.

The remaining six are in use on a Virgin Trains coach service between Milton

WHITES COACHES

The first bus operator in Oxfordshire to run an entirely lowfloor fleet has completed the change with the purchase of a new Optare Solo.

Whites Coaches of Culham runs 12 local services using a fleet of seven buses, all of which are now low-floor Solos. Partners David Bainbridge and Nick Bland made the decision to standardise on Solo following good experience with the model, which they

first bought in 2003.

"From the outset we found them ideal for the work we are doing in providing local services in a rural town areas," David Bainbridge explains.

"They're a compact size for the country lanes and narrow streets in historic towns, have good carrying capacity and are liked by both drivers and passengers for the comfortable ride they provide."

"From a repair and maintenance point of view we've found it sensible to standardise on one model



TANAT VALLEY COACHES

Three Optare Tempos have entered service with long-established operator Tanat Valley Coaches, becoming the first Optare products to enter a 60-vehicle fleet. Michael Morris, who runs the 85-year-old business with his brother Peter, says the Tempos were chosen following a careful evaluation that took account both of operating and maintenance needs.

"We tried a Tempo belonging to another operator and liked the vehicle. It's well built and it's reasonably heavy, so offered a comfortable ride. The fact that it has an integral body appealed to us and the location of the cable trunking in the roof coving would, we felt, eliminate the problem of wiring corrosion from dirt and water that

comes off the country roads on which these buses will operate."

Of the four lengths in which Tempo is offered, Tanat Valley Coaches chose the 12-metre version as this offered the best compromise between passenger capacity and route compatibility. The buses can each carry 46 passengers on Esteban seats, of which six are tip-ups in the two-wheelchair bay. Standees take the total capacity to over 70.

A comfortable ride is assured by the use of all-round air suspension with a two-bag system on the front axle and a four-bag system on the rear. Tinted side windows will help to keep the saloon cooler, aided by hoppers for ventilation.

The six-cylinder Mercedes-Benz 906La engine rated at 180 kw (242 bhp) powers the Tempos and is matched to an Allison T310R automatic transmission with integral retarder. Tempo's class-leading unladen weight

of 9.6 tonnes will also contribute to lower fuel consumption.

Tanat Valley Coaches was set up soon after the first world war by the uncle of Michael and Peter Morris, whose father joined the business in the mid-1920s. Today it has a fleet of 60 vehicles from taxis to full-size buses and is licenced for 34 PSVs, a figure it hopes will shortly increase to 38 to take account of expansion following the start of the new cross-border service.

Operator rating: 8/10 "So far, so good. The passengers are happy and we get great support from Optare."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Tempo (integral)

Engine Mercedes-Benz 906La

Transmission Allison T310R

Seats 46

Spec Tinted side windows

Supplied by Optare 0870 0330005

Keynes and Luton Airport.

The order is a repeat for Volvo, who supplied 55 B7Rs to Stagecoach between November and February.

Stagecoach's technical engineer, Adrian Havlin, says: "This is our second order of wheelchair-accessible coaches from Volvo."

"They have been very well received both by our able-bodied and wheelchair-using customers, and we have been pleased by the reliability of the vehicles."

"The new coaches are an excellent addition to our fleet as we continue our drive to attract more people to public transport."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B7R/Plaxton Profile

Engine Volvo D7C 275bhp

Transmission ZF six-speed

Seats 49

Spec Wheelchair accessible

Supplied by Volvo Bus 01509 217700



and the Solo is such a simple vehicle to work on. Panels come off easily to make minor damage repairs quick and simple to carry out. We also don't need to carry a wide range of parts to cover different makes and models."

The latest addition to the fleet is an 8.5-metre long model. It has 29 Esteban Civic VO seats with three tip-ups in the wheelchair bay. With standees, the bus can carry 55 passengers, enabling it to meet peak demands for people travelling to work.

To power its new bus,

Whites Coaches has opted for the Mercedes-Benz 904La engine at the higher of its two ratings. This delivers 110 kW (147bhp) and is matched to an Allison 2000 series five-speed fully automatic transmission.

The Solo's full air suspension contributes to a smoother, more comfortable ride and the front air bags can be exhausted to enable the bus to kneel, and provide an entrance step height of just 200mm. All-round disc brakes with ABS provide sure-footed braking in all road and load conditions and the integral

Klam retarder reduces wear on the service brakes.

Operator rating: 10/10 "We find them good, solid motors and have had no problems with the Solo."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Solo (integral)

Engine Mercedes-Benz 904La

Transmission Allison 2000 five speed

Seats 29

Spec Mobitech LED equipment

Supplied by Optare 0870 0330005

New tourism manager in Folkestone

Chris Kirkham has been appointed as manager of the Discover Folkestone, Hythe and Romney tourism partnership. Chris will be responsible for membership, marketing and sales promotion in this region of Kent.

Chris' most recent industry position prior to this was as passenger services manager at Norfolkline Dover Dunkerque Ferries.

He joins the not-for-profit organisation after extensive experience in the travel and tourism industry, including sales and customer service management roles in the hotel, tour operating and destination promotion sectors.



Uni-link boss: Alec Gore

New boss at Uni-link Southampton

Alec Gore has joined the University of Southampton as transport manager to oversee the running of Uni-link. He takes over the role recently made vacant by the retirement of John Waugh.

Alec joins the university from Reading Borough Council, where he was in charge of accessible transport operations. This involved the provision of accessible minibus transport for

both disabled and elderly users across the borough. Prior to that, Alec spent 16 years as a police inspector in Hong Kong, where he served in marine, personnel and traffic police departments.

He said: "As transport manager at the university, I will be responsible for a variety of tasks, namely cycle storage and security, the control of student parking, and the highly-successful Uni-link bus network. I hope to be able to bring my own sets of specialist skills, both in roadcraft and psychology to the role."

"The job will provide challenges, including solving capacity issues on Uni-link, where we have just carried our 10 millionth passenger since services began a little over five years ago. However, having seen the extremely busy nature of Hong Kong's 10,000-strong bus operations at close quarters over many years, I might be able to suggest a few solutions!"



Stepping down: Colin Thompson

MD steps down at Reading

Colin Thompson, managing director at council-owned Reading Buses, is to retire from the industry at the end of December after spending nine years with the operator. He said last week that the company was in a strong position to benefit from the anticipated future growth of the town, and that the appointment of a new chief executive for the company would assist this process.

"Reading Buses needs a chief executive who can see it through the decade, building on the base we have established in the last one," he said.

Reading Buses chairman, Tony Jones, added that Thompson had done a great job, but the move opened the door for someone new to run the business. "When he arrived, there had been some turbulence in the company, and he was able to bring a stable hand to affairs," said Jones. "We now feel we need to take another step and move on to build on the success and the foundations that he has laid to make the company more successful. We want to develop the role into a chief executive, so we are looking for a person with a different skills mix."

Engineering Director Lincoln

Stagecoach East Midlands is seeking a highly motivated manager to lead the engineering functions of the company, reporting directly to the MD and based at our Head Office in Lincoln.

Our bus services cover Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Humberside and are operated by a fleet of 530 buses based at 10 depots across the East Midlands. We provide a mix of local service, inter-urban and inter-city express work.

To be successful in this post you must have:

- the drive and ability to lead and motivate staff and be able to work with people at all levels
- a demonstrable record of using engineering management skills in the bus industry
- thorough technical knowledge plus membership of an appropriate professional body
- the desire and enthusiasm to achieve and maintain high engineering standards
- personal integrity
- a problem solving "can do" mentality
- a clear understanding of employment law, health and safety legislation and other relevant regulations
- the ability to deliver the annual budget and develop financial action plans for future growth

Stagecoach East Midlands is a newly formed company including the recently acquired RoadCar business and this post offers an exciting opportunity for the right candidate.



For any additional information call Gary Nolan on 01522 522255 or email gary.nolan@stagecoachbus.com

Please forward your CV together with a letter of application to:

Gary Nolan
Managing Director
Stagecoach East Midlands
PO Box 15
Deacon Road
Lincoln LN2 4JB

Closing date
15 December 2006



Time for a change: Keith Payne

Payne leaves Redwing

After eight years, Keith Payne has announced he is leaving Redwing Coaches as group sales and marketing manager. His last day in the job will be on December 19.

Keith said: "I just felt it was time for a change really, time to move on. I have got very fond memories of my time at Redwing, I have put a lot into it and I hope that continues in the future. It'll be nice to get a few more days off than I'm used to this Christmas, so I'm looking forward to that."

Keith will likely take up a new job, possibly within the industry, in the new year. He wished all at Redwing well and thanked them for their support over the past eight years.

OBITUARY

FRANK THORPE SNR. 1926-2006

Frank Thorpe Snr. passed away peacefully on November 19.

After military service in WW2 with the Parachute Regiment he had a long career in the bus and coach industry spanning five decades. He was involved in marketing the first 11m coach for Ford in the 60s as a salesman, then setting up a private hire coach business and influencing his sons' entry into the London bus market as Thorpes Buses in the 90s. He spent his retirement fulfilling an ambition as a farmer in the Forest of Dean.

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2003 Iveco Beaulas Midi Star



32 reclining seats, 3 point belts, A/c, toilet, servery, fridge, radio, DVD, Tector engine and 6 speed gear box. As new condition, low mileage. MoT 22/7/07 ~~£110,000 +vat~~ **NOW £106,000 +vat**

2000 Iveco Beaulas Stergo



49 reclining seats, A/c, central toilet, continental door, drinks, boiler, cool box, radio, video. Very clean, superb condition. 290 engine and 6 speed box. MoT 1/6/07 ~~£92,500 +vat~~ **NOW £88,000 +vat**

1997 Scania L94 Intercentury



53 reclining seats, A/c, radio, comfort shift box. Very clean superb condition. MoT 10/6/07 ~~£56,000 +vat~~ **NOW £52,000 +vat**

1996 Toyota Caetano Optimo



21 reclining seats, Mk 3, radio. Power door. Very good, clean condition. MoT 5/8/07 ~~£13,000 +vat~~ **NOW £11,000 +vat**

1988 Volvo B10m Plaxton 3500



53 reclining seats, power door, radio. Ideal contract coach. Good clean condition. MoT 19/9/07 (to be tested before sale) ~~£12,000 +vat~~ **NOW £10,500 +vat**

2000 Iveco Beaulas Stergo



53 reclining seats, A/c, cool box, radio, video, 290 engine and 6 speed box. Very clean, superb condition. MoT 10/6/07 ~~£87,500 +vat~~ **NOW £82,500 +vat**

1986 Mercedes 0303



53 reclining seats, radio, power door. Good clean condition. MoT 2/2/07 ~~£10,000 +vat~~ **NOW £7,500 +vat**

1999 Iveco Beaulas Stergo



53 reclining seats, A/C cool box, radio, video, 290 engine and 6 speed box. Choice of two. Very good clean condition. MoT 8/8/07 and 18/8/06 ~~£80,000 each +vat~~ **NOW £76,000 each +vat**

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1992 J REG LEYLAND LYNX MK 2,

Cummins L10/ZF, 51 seats, from a very good home.



1989 F REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS

Cummins L10/ZF, Northern Counties bodies, 75 seats, semi low-height.



1985 B REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS

Gardner/Hydracyclic, 77 seats, low height, new tests.



1993 K REG DENNIS DARTS,

Cummins/Allison, Alexander Dash bodies, 40 seats, good tests.



1988 E REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS

Gardner 6LXB/Hydracyclic, Optare bodies, 76 seats, good tests.



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1989 F REG LEYLAND OLYMPIAN,

Cummins L10/ZF, Leyland body, 78 seats, new test.



1985 B REG LEYLAND OLYMPIAN

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1997 P REG DENNIS DART SLF'S,

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1989 F REG SCANIA 113'S, voith gearboxes, alexander bodies, 80 seats.



1995 DENNIS DART

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1990 G REG LEYLAND LYNXES,

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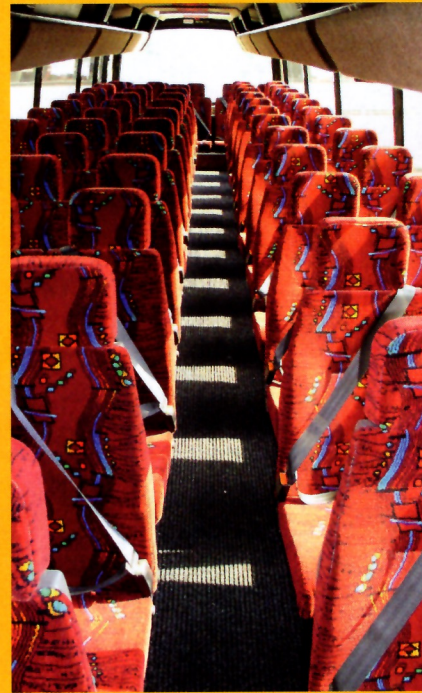
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		SLZ 5529
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## Office Diary

From the editorial director's desk...

**Monday:** Issue day... again. One of those deadline days that drags on and on and on... Finish too late to go home so head north towards Blackburn. Abandon ship at 4.00am at Blythe Services. Check into the Travelodge. £49 and the world's worst shower. Grim!

**Tuesday:** Midday meeting with East Lancs' John Horn. Good fun really. John's enthusiasm is infectious. A 'bus man' through and through I'd guess. East Lancs is about as far from the sort of robot-ruled factory you imagine churning out buses in Europe. Actually reminds me of Harley Davidson in Milwaukee, hand-built in the true sense of the words! Try to get to the bottom of East Lancs' ethos. It seems to be 'if you can describe it, we'll have a go at making it!' I leave with armfuls of books and brochures. No free bus models though, John's found out they go for £50+ on ebay. After my fourth NW trip in a week, decide the M6 Toll Road is probably the best road in the world.

**Wednesday:** A supplier phones about my editorial. He's as bemused as me as to why we can't seem to find an accurate figure for UK operators. He says he's been trying to agree a figure for years and currently guesstimates 4,500. Great, another figure!

**Thursday:** Realise it's only five weeks to our Xmas issue and I haven't planned any 'funny' stories. Spend day looking at cartoonists' web-sites!

**Friday:** DfT calls to invite us to a photocall at 10 Downing Street on Monday. Andrew Peace is totally over excited. Try to warn him that a face-to-face with Mr Blair afterwards over tea and biscuits is unlikely!



INVESTMENT: Steve O'Neill, managing director of The Kings Ferry, with one of the 10 new coaches in his fleet

## Kings Ferry roll out new wagons

THE Kings Ferry Travel Group is investing £2 million in 10 new coaches as part of its ongoing commitment to ensure all passengers benefit from the latest developments in com-

the National Exhibition Centre. Steve O'Neill, managing director of Medway-based The Kings Ferry, travelled to Spain to oversee the detailing of the new 59 and 49-seater coaches which

## The Kings Ferry moves into trucking?

When it comes to publicity, the media may be guided along the right road in presenting your latest news in a totally positive fashion, but the outcome can be in the lap of the gods!

The Kings Ferry, based in north Kent, is an extremely well-known and respected firm with a good eye for promoting itself and the concept of quality coaching. Hence the local press, in this case the *Kentish*

*Saturday Observer and Kent on Sunday*, duly reported the £2m acquisition of ten new MAN Noge coaches, complete with a good shot of MD, Steve O'Neill, and one of the steeds.

Excellent stuff, except whoever created the title for the piece needs to understand that the word "ferry" is not only associated with trucks!

Perhaps the Kings Ferry should invite the culprit to take a trip in one of their coaches and write about the difference between wagons and coaches?

## No men allowed

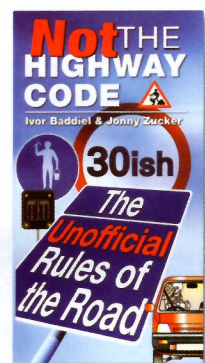
The Brazilian city of Goiania looks set to follow in the footsteps of Rio de Janeiro by running female-only buses to stop the problem of rush-hour groping.

Councillor Mauricio Beraldo said: "The beautiful women of Goiania are constantly being harassed on overcrowded buses by men who seem unable to control themselves."

## Del Boy in Pole position

Having recently revealed that it employs 1,000 Polish drivers, First Group has set up a training base in Poland and is practicing some unusual training methods. Episodes of *Only Fools and Horses* are being screened to prospective London drivers, while in Glasgow Billy Connolly gigs are studied.

A red double-decker has also been sent over to complete the authentic British driving experience. Renowned for their hard-working ways, few Polish drivers quit within the first year, which has been a problem for the industry in the UK.



## Not the Highway Code

The real road users' bible titled 'Not the Highway Code' is available now to buy from all good bookshops. It contains 136 hilarious pages of driving 'advice' such as how to avoid being fined for driving in bus lanes: "Buy a bus and drive around in it; even though that defeats the whole point of bus lanes, prosecuting you for driving a bus in a bus lane is legally preposterous."

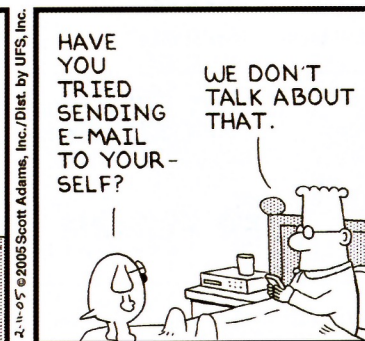
Priced only £7.99, this will make a great stocking filler. ■ CBW has five copies to give away to the first five letters we open titled "Not the Highway Code."

## Googled...

[http://www.drive-alive.co.uk/driving\\_tips.html](http://www.drive-alive.co.uk/driving_tips.html)

"European driving" in Google brings up an informative and simple guide to driving across Europe. The website, produced by Drive Alive, the motoring holiday specialists, features tips for Italy, Belgium, France, Luxembourg and many more popular destinations, including speed limits, seatbelt and alcohol laws and general motoring advice. There is also a route planner and local and national maps can be purchased online from as little as £5.99 including delivery. If you are unsure about routes, tolls, ferry crossings, insurance and visa regulations or hotel prices, this website can help.

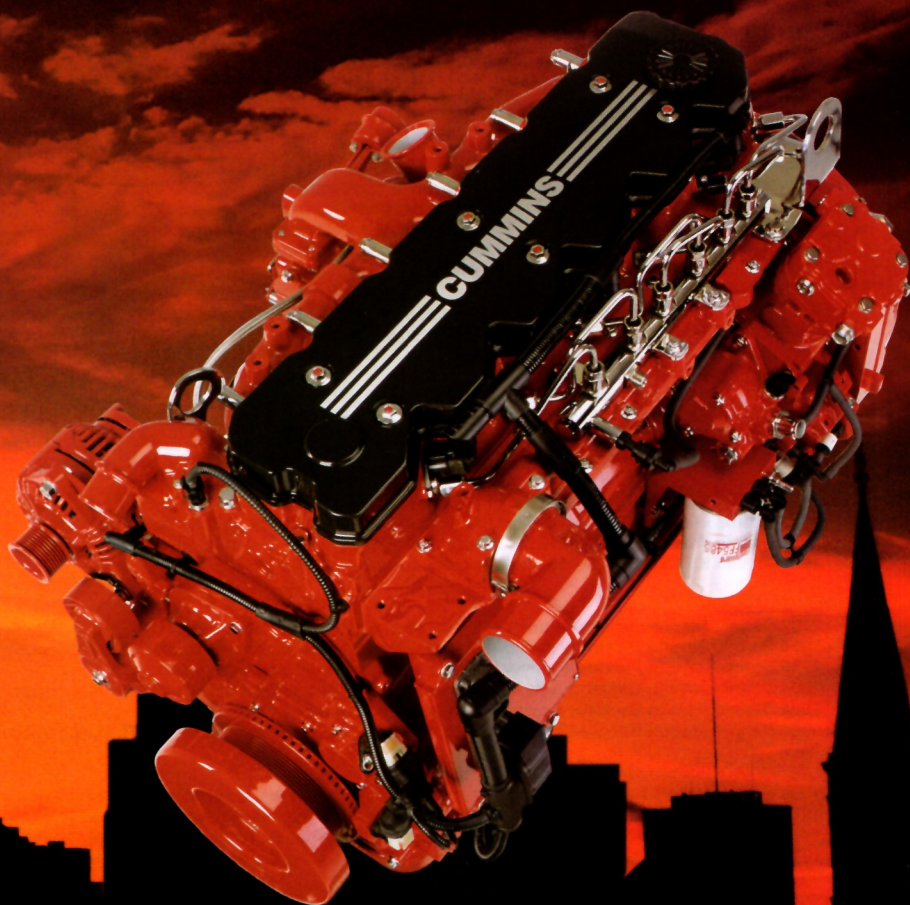
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## Volvo coach

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- 1997 Volvo B10M Excalibur - 49/53 seats, demount air conditioning, continental door, courier seat, double glazing.
- 1996 Volvo B10M Van Hool Alizee - 49 seats, manual, drinks machine, courier seat.
- 1996 Volvo B10M Van Hool Alizee - 47 seats, rear floor toilet, rear servery, TV/video.
- 1996 Volvo B10M Premier - 53 seats, air conditioning, courier seat, double glazing.
- 1995 Volvo B10M Van Hool Alizee - 67 seats, 3x2, lap/diagonal belts, courier seat, double glazing.
- 1994 Volvo B10M Jonckheere - 49 seats, centre sunken toilet, drinks machine, air conditioning, continental door.
- 1989 Volvo B10M Duple 320 - 53 seats, toilet, manual, courier seat.

## DAF coach

- 1996 DAF SB3000 Plaxton Premier - 51 seats, automatic, courier seat, seat belts, toilet.
- 1994 DAF Bova Futura - 70 seats, new Cogent seats, three point belts, air conditioning, new MOT.
- 1992 DAF MB230 Van Hool Alizee - 51 seats, manual, TV/video, courier seat, toilet.
- 1990 DAF Bova Futura Band Bus - 12 bunks, servery, TV/DVD, air conditioning, leather seating.

## Scania coach

- 1999 Scania L94 Irizar Century - 53 seats, air conditioning, automatic, courier seat, long MOT.
- 1994 Scania K124 TRB Irizar - 49 seats, air conditioning, manual, TV/video, courier seat, toilet.
- 1988 Scania K93 Duple 320 - 55 seats, manual, courier seat, new MOT.

## Dennis coach

- 2002 Dennis R series Plaxton Panther - 53 seats, manual, courier seat, new MOT.
- 1995 Dennis Javelin Plaxton Premier - 53 seats, manual, air conditioning, courier seat, destination, new MOT.
- 1995 Dennis Javelin Plaxton Premier - 50 seats, toilet, manual, courier seat, new MOT.
- 1994 Dennis Javelin Caetano Algarve - 70 seats, Cogent seats, three point belts, new conversion.
- 1994 Dennis Javelin Caetano Algarve - 53 seats, manual, courier seat, new MOT.
- 1994 Dennis Javelin Neoplan Transliner - 53 seats, automatic, air conditioning, MOT, choice available.

## Other coach

- 1998 MAN Berkhoff Axial - 33 seats, courier seat, manual, TV/video, fridge, drinks machine, toilet.
- 1988 Setra 215 HD - 49 seats, toilet, courier seat, drinks machine, manual, servery, new MOT.
- 1988 Cummins Van Hool T815 - 49 seats, toilet, drinks machine, TV, courier seat, manual.
- 1984 Leyland Tiger Plaxton Paramount - 53 seats, MOT, semi-automatic, courier seat, MOT.

## Service buses

- 2003 Dennis Dart Plaxton Pointer 2 10.7m - 37 seats, wheelchair ramp, single door, SLF.
- 2002 Dennis Dart Caetano Nimbus 10.1m - 31 seats, dual door, TFL specification, choice available.
- 2001 Dennis Dart East Lancs Spryte 10.7m - 40 seats, single door, white, MOT.
- 1998 Scania L93 East Lancs 12m - 49 seats, step entrance, single door, white, MOT.
- 1997 Dennis Dart East Lancs Spryte 10.7m - 25 seats, airport racked, single door.
- 1997 Dennis Dart East Lancs Spryte 10.7m - 25 seats, airport racked, dual door, choice available.
- 1997 Dennis Dart Marshall 10.7m - 37 seats, single door, SLF.
- 1996 Mercedes 0814D ALX 100 - 27 seats, manual, power door, destination gear, large choice available.
- 1981 MCW Metrobus Decker - 71 seats, dual door.

## Accessible vehicles

- 2001 Mercedes 413 CDI UVM Treka - 16 seats, rear/side entrance, sprint shift, tail lift, choice available.
- 1996 Mercedes 308D - Ex London Dial-A-Ride, 7 seats, rear/side entrance, Ratcliffe tail lift, automatic, choice available.

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